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BOOK

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COLLECTION

OF

BRITISH AUTHORS.

VOL. XCVIII.

ELLEN MIDDLETON

BY

LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

IN ONE VOLUME.

ELLEN MIDDLETON.

A TALE.

BY

Charlotte (Leveson-Gower)
LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

SANCTIONED BY THE AUTHOR FOR CONTINENTAL CIRCULATION.

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"I have read of a bird which hath a face like, and yet will pr
a man, who, coming to the water to drink, and finding there by
that he had killed one like himself, pineth away by degrees, a
after enjoyeth itself. Such was in some sort the condition of
accident that *he* had killed one put a period to his carnal mirth,
a covering to his eyes all the days of his life. Death was so sen
as to allow him time to rise up on his knees and to crie, 'L
mercy upon me.'" — *Fuller's Worthies*, vol. ii., p. 17.

INTRODUCTION.

"From each carved nook, and fretted bend,
Cornice and gallery, seem to send
Tones that with Seraph hymns might blend.

"Three solemn parts together twine,
In Harmony's mysterious line,
Three solemn aisles approach the shrine.

"Yet all are one, together all,
With thoughts that awe but not appal,
Teach the adoring heart to fall." CHRISTIAN YEAR.

"But let my due feet never fail
To walk the studious cloister's pale,
And love the high-embowered roof,
With antic pillars massy proof,
And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light;
There let the pealing organ blow,
To the full voiced quire below,
In service high and anthems clear,
As may with sweetness through mine ear
Dissolve me into extasies,
And bring all Heaven before mine eyes." MILTON.

"What child of sorrow
Art thou, that com'st wrapt up in weeds of sadness,
And mov'st as if thy steps were towards a grave?"
OTWAY.

IT was on the 15th of October, 18—, that one of the best and most respected clergymen in the town of —, and a canon of the cathedral, turned his steps towards the western door of that ancient pile. It was a little before the hour of evening service; the rays of the declining sun were shining brightly through the windows of painted glass, and producing that mellow and chastened

light that accords so well with the feeling of religious awe, whic
a gothic edifice, the noblest of the works of man, is calculated t
inspire; a work where he has been enabled to stamp on what i
material an indelible impress of that spirit of devotion, whic
unites the utmost simplicity of faith with the highest sublimity o
creed.

Mr. Lacy's attachment to this particular cathedral had grow
with his growth and strengthened with his years. In his youth he
had learnt to love its long deep aisles, its solemn arches, its
quaint carvings. During the pauses between the several parts of
divine service, his childish imagination would dwell upon the
topics of thought suggested by the histories of saints and martyrs
depicted in the glowing colours of the stained glass windows, or in
the intricate workmanship of the minster screen. The swelling
peal of the organ, the chaunting of the choristers, awoke in his
young mind strange and bright imaginings of those things "which
the eye of man has not seen, nor his ear heard, and that it has not
entered into his heart to conceive."

To wander in the cloisters, and gather the flowers growing
there among the old tombstones, and to think the while of the
lilies of the field, which Solomon in all his glory could not equal;
or of the wilderness that blossomed like the rose, at the word of
the Lord; to collect in his own hands at Christmas as much holly
as his puny strength could carry, and add it to the shining heap al-
ready standing at the cathedral door; to follow it in, with timid
steps, and watch with wondering eyes, the adorning of the altar,
the pulpit, the stalls, and the pews; to observe with childish glee
two tall branches, all glowing with their coral berries, placed by
the bench where he knelt in church with his mother; to sit at home
by that mother of an evening, and with his Prayer Book on his
knee, learn from her lips how that glorious hymn which he so
loved to chaunt in church, and which spoke of angels and martyrs,
of saints and apostles, of Heaven and earth, uniting in one concert
of adoration, had been bequeathed to the holy church universal by
a saint who had served his Creator from the days of his youth, and
never wandered from the sacred shade of the sanctuary; for the
baptism of another, who, after straying far and wide in the ways

of sin and the maze of error, followed the while by a mother's prayers and tears, returned at last to the foot of the cross,*

"With that free spirit blest,
Who to the contrite can dispense
The princely heart of innocence;"

to hear her tell how the three solemn parts of his beloved cathedral, all approaching the shrine in distinct majesty, and in mystical union, were a type and an emblem of the "Holy, Blessed, and Glorious Trinity," so devoutly worshipped in the opening verses of the Litany; to be often reminded by her, when the deep melodious bells of the old tower spoke their loud summons to the house of God on festival and holiday, of the time when the faith in Christ was a matter of danger and of death, and the sanctuaries were laid among the vaults and the tombs—when in darkness and in silence Christians knelt on the cold stones, and a short hurried bell from the altar alone warned them of the moment when the blessed pledges of salvation were consecrated there. These were the joys of his childhood. These were the thoughts and the feelings which entwined themselves with his very being, and wound themselves round his heart; blending the memory of the past with the hopes of futurity. And when Mrs. Lacy, whose health had been gradually declining, died soon after her son had received the sacred rite of confirmation, and for the first time knelt by her side at the altar; it was not before her trembling lips had pronounced a blessing on the child, who, with her hand locked in his, and his eyes fixed on hers with the steady gaze of earnest, but, as far as this world was concerned, of hopeless affection, had given her the assurance that her people should be his people, and her God his God; that where she had lived there would he live, there would he die, and there also would he be buried.

As soon as his age warranted it he became a priest; and in the course of time, a canon of the cathedral of —. What had been the joys of his boyhood, became, afterwards, the safeguards of his manhood, and finally the support and comfort of his declining years. The business of his life was prayer, and the exercise of the

* The Te Deum is supposed to have been composed by St. Ambrose, Archbishop of Milan, for the baptism of St. Augustine.

most unwearied and ardent charity. Its ruling principle, love to God, and to man. In the few hours of relaxation which he allowed himself, he found his pleasures in the study of ecclesiastical architecture, of the lives of saints and martyrs, above all, of everything that was in any way connected with the foundation, and the history of the several parts of that minster which he loved with all the holy love which men are wont to feel for the country of their birth and for the home of their youth, and, moreover, with a feeling akin to that which made Jacob exclaim, as he rose from his resting-place at Bethel, "This is the house of God, and the gate of Heaven!"

As I am not writing Mr. Lacy's history, it is unnecessary to enter into further details respecting the events of his life, if events they can be called, that chiefly consisted in the casual opportunities vouchsafed to him, of soothing some extraordinary sorrow; of recalling to the fold of Christ some wandering sinner, and of performing works of mercy and self-denial such as are seldom met with or even heard of in this luxurious and self-indulgent age. I will, therefore, revert to that hour of evening prayer which this chapter began by describing, as it will introduce us at once to the subject of this story.

Mr. Lacy had seated himself in his stall, and his eyes were glancing over the small congregation that had gathered together, on a week-day, for divine worship, when his attention was attracted by a woman who was sitting on one of the benches generally occupied by the poorest inhabitants of the town. She was very simply dressed, in deep mourning; but there was something about her attitude and countenance which plainly indicated that she belonged to the higher classes of society. It was impossible to guess at her age; for although the slightness of her figure and the delicate beauty of her features gave her the appearance of youth, her face bore a wild and haggard expression that we seldom see in those who have not far advanced on their pilgrimage through life. Her arm was thrown against one of the adjoining pillars, and just before the beginning of the service she laid her head upon it, and neither stirred nor looked up durin the time the prayers lasted. She neither knelt when others kne'

nor stood when they stood. Once only, when the organ sounded the first notes of one of the most beautiful anthems of our church, she rose from her seat almost mechanically, and an instant after resumed her former attitude. At the conclusion of the service, when the worshippers had all left the cathedral, Mr. Lacy passed near the place where the stranger still remained in a state of apparent abstraction; the sound of his approaching footsteps startled her; she hastily withdrew, and walked rapidly out of the church, and down one of the small streets that faced the entrance door. Two or three times during the succeeding fortnight, Mr. Lacy noticed the same person occupying the same place, and conducting herself in the same manner. His interest was powerfully excited, but he neither ventured to address her, nor could he succeed in ascertaining from the vergers, or from one or two other persons whom he questioned on the subject, anything respecting her. Chance, however, as it often happens in such cases, threw the information he sought in his way.

He was sitting one evening in his room, busily engaged in preparing his sermon for the Feast of All Saints, which occurred on the ensuing day, and on which it was his turn to preach, when he was disturbed by a knock at the door, and the subsequent entrance of an elderly woman, whom he had known for many years, and who had been in the habit of consulting him whenever any little scruple of conscience disturbed her in the exercise of her line of business, which was no other than that of lodging-letting. Mr. Lacy was so well acquainted with the character of his old friend, and with the nature of the difficulties usually submitted to him, that, after begging her to sit down, and draw her chair close to the fire, (for the last day of October was ushering in with suitable severity the first of November,) he immediately began —

"Well, my good Mrs. Denley, any more drunken lodgers, whom you keep on, for fear that no one but yourself would help them up to their rooms, and see that they did not spend the night in a less comfortable place than their beds? or are you still doubting as to the propriety of giving notice to quit to the gentleman who spoils your furniture, and never pays his rent, thereby keeping you from sending Johnny to school, as you had intended?"

"No, no, Sir; it has nothing to do with drunken lodgers, or with poor dear Johnny's going to school, or with not getting the rent paid, and all that; what 's disturbing me now; but only just the contrary."

As it was difficult to understand, without farther explanation, how the contrary of these three things could be disturbing Mrs. Denley's mind, Mr. Lacy looked at her inquiringly, and she continued:

"You see, Sir, it is not exactly, as one might say, any business of mine; and I mind well what is said in St. Paul's Epistle to Timothy, that women should not be tattlers and busybodies; but for all that, I hope it is no sin to wish a young creature that 's under one's roof, and that 's dying by inches — of something — the Lord only knows what — for Dr. Reid doesn't. He saw her walking in, Sir, the other day, and I made so bold as to ask her if she wouldn't speak to him, but she wouldn't; and he says as how he can't guess what 's the matter with her; and if he can't, why, who should? Well, as I was saying, Sir, I hope it isn't a sin to wish the poor young thing not to die, without medicine for her body, or means of grace for her soul."

"Assuredly, you are quite right in forming such a wish, and in endeavouring to prevent so terrible an occurrence. But who is the person you are alluding to?"

"She is my lodger, Sir, and has been for the last six weeks."

"What is her name?" inquired Mr. Lacy.

"Mrs. Rodney, Sir."

"Has she no friends that you know of? How came she to hear of your lodgings?"

"Why, she stopped (on a Monday, I think it was) at the 'Rose,' and she asked Mr. Chapman if he could tell her of a quiet kind of respectable lodging in the town; now, Mr. Chapman is always willing to do one a good turn. It was him, Sir, that sent Johnny back to Ashby, on Tuesday last, in a return post-chaise, after he had sprained his ancle. A very good man, and a neighbourly, is Mr. Chapman; and, as I was saying, he likes to do one a good turn; so that when the lady asked for decent

respectable lodgings, he said he knew of the very thing as would suit her; and sure enough, the next morning she came to see the rooms, and took them at once; and nothing would serve her but to pay down at once the rent for six months; and when I made so free as to say she had better not, for fear of changing her mind about them, she grew quite savage like; for all that she is a gentle-looking creature, and said as violent as could be, 'It must be so — take the money.' Well, thought I to myself, may be she fancies I don't like her for a lodger; so I just said, in an easy kind of manner, 'Well, Ma'am, and I hope, when the six months are past, that you may take them on for another half-year.' But 'No,' says she; 'six months will do,' which, to be sure, was a natural thing enough for her to say; but I take it, that if you had been there, Sir, and had heard her say it, you would not have thought it quite natural either."

"Is this lady whom you are speaking of in deep mourning? and does she occasionally attend the cathedral service?"

"She does, Sir; and is always dressed in black. She sits near the pillar where Mrs. Jones used to sit, poor soul, when she was alive."

"I have remarked her; she does indeed look both ill and unhappy. Do you know anything of her history?"

"Not a word, Sir; she wears a wedding-ring, but her clothes are marked with an E. and an M., for all that she calls herself Mrs. Rodney."

"Does she ever enter into conversation with you?"

"Sometimes, a little. Last week, Joe Irving, the under-gardener at Clomley lodge, brought me, as a present, a large nosegay of dahlias and china-asters. I carried them up-stairs, and while Mrs. Rodney was in church, I put them into jars, on the table, and on the chimney-piece, and very bright and pretty they looked. So when she came in, she noticed them and thanked me, and spoke quite cheerful. As she was standing a-talking to me about them, an insect ran out from between the leaves, and I tried to kill it, but she caught my hand and stopped me; and *her* hand, Sir! — why it was more like one of those bits of hot coal there, than the little white soft thing it looked like, and when I looked at

her face, there was a bright fever spot on each cheek, and her lips were as white as could be.

"'You are very ill, Ma'am,' says I to her; 'your hand is burning-hot.' She put it to her forehead and 'it does not feel hot to me,' says she, and walks away to the window and opens it, for all that it was almost as cold and raw as to-night. But, now, and that 's what I 'm come about, Sir, she has taken to her bed, and is in a very bad way indeed, I take it."

"What! and has not she seen the doctor?"

"No, indeed, Mr. Lacy; she won't as much as let him come into the house. When she found herself so ill, that she could not do for herself, she sent me to get one of the hospital nurses; and as Mary Evans was to be had, the girl that you was so good to last year when she broke her arm, I got her to come, and she has been with her these two days."

"Has she never spoken of seeing a clergyman?"

"Why, to say the truth, Sir, I made so bold as to ask her on it; it was yesterday when Mary Evans and I had been a-begging of her to let us fetch the doctor. 'No, no,' says she, 'he can do me no good;' and she fell to crying, which I had not seen her do before. 'Well, Ma'am,' says I, 'if he can do you no good, I know some one that would.' 'And who is that?' says she, sitting up in her bed, and looking hard at me. 'Mr. Lacy, Ma'am,' I said, 'the clergyman that read prayers last Sunday afternoon.' She laid down again, disappointed like, and I went on to say how you was quite a saint and a martyr, and a luminary of the church, as Johnny's schoolmaster says..."

"Hush, hush, my good Mrs. Denley; take care how you apply, or rather misapply, such names as those. But did Mrs. Rodney decline seeing me, or any other clergyman?"

"She did, Sir, and begged me not to mention it again."

"This is, indeed, a sad case: a woman young, friendless — dying, perhaps, and probably labouring under some mental affliction, and yet refusing to have recourse to the consolations of religion, and the ministry of the church," said Mr. Lacy, speaking rather to himself than to Mrs. Denley. "Have you," added he, turning to her, "any reason to suppose that this poor woman,

notwithstanding her occasional attendance on the cathedral service, is a dissenter?"

"No, Sir, I think not; she has a small prayer-book, which I sometimes see lying on her table."

"Well, my dear Mrs. Denley," said Mr. Lacy, after a few moments' reflection; "we must both pray that God, of his infinite mercy, may dispose the heart of this young creature to turn to Him, and to the means of grace, which He has Himself appointed. To-morrow, when we kneel in the house of God, rejoicing with joy unspeakable over the glory of the church triumphant, and meditating on the blessedness of that holy multitude

'Who climbed the steep ascent to Heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain,'

each in our place, we will bear in mind this suffering lamb of the fold, and pray earnestly that to her, as well as to us,

'Grace may be given, to follow in their train.'"

"I will, Sir: I will," replied the good old woman, with tears in her eyes. "But won't you try and see her?"

"I cannot force myself into her presence," answered Mr. Lacy; "but every day I will call at your house to inquire after her health, hoping and trusting that the hour will come when she will cease to shut her doors against one commissioned by our Lord, to bear words of peace to the wretched, and of pardon to the guilty. Whatever you can do to hasten that moment, I know you will do, my good friend, and so farewell to you."

"Good-night to you, and thank you kindly, Mr. Lacy; it must be a heavy heart indeed, that goes away from you no lighter than when it came to you:" and so saying, Mrs. Denley put on her cloak, took up her lanthorn, and trudged home, through the dark streets of the old town.

The next morning Mr. Lacy's thoughts were divided between the joyful contemplations which the holy festival it was ushering in was calculated to inspire, and the painful solicitude which the conversation of the preceding evening had left on his mind. In church, however, the latter feeling subsided, and gave way to that earnest calmness, and that intense devotion, which absorb for the time the cares and troubles *of the* soul, "like motes in light divine."

When from the pulpit this aged minister dwelt in glowing words on the communion between the saints above and the saints below; on the link that unites the church militant here on earth with the church triumphant in Heaven; above all, when in terms of the deepest reverence and of the intensest love, he spoke of our Lord Jesus Christ, and prayed that he himself, and all those who joined with him in prayer that day, might each, in God's own time, enter into the fulness of his presence, and worship in his courts evermore, yea in time and in eternity, there was something so ardent in his aspirations, and yet so chastened in his devotion, that the assembled multitude heard him with a reverence, mingled with awe; they felt as if Elijah's car of fire might bear him away from their sight; from the shelter of the sanctuary on earth to the glories of the new Jerusalem on high.

After the conclusion of the sermon, Mr. Lacy remained absorbed in earnest prayer, till the last of the worshippers had withdrawn, and the parting strain from the organ had died away on the walls of the cathedral. As he was slowly descending the aisle, he paused before the place where Mrs. Rodney had been seated some days before; as he stood musing on the account which he had heard of her from Mrs. Denley, he observed a few lines written in pencil on the column against which she had been in the habit o leaning. They were so faintly marked, and had probably been s much effaced since, that he found great difficulty in making thei out. At last he succeeded in doing so, and they were as follows:-

"My aching heart is breaking,
My burning brain is reeling,
My very soul is riven,
I feel myself forsaken.
And phantom forms of horror,
And shapeless dreams of terror,
And mocking tones of laughter,
About me seem to gather;
And death, and hell, and darkness
Are driving me to madness."

It would be difficult to describe the revulsion of feeling w Mr. Lacy experienced on reading the expression of a despair contrasted so strikingly with the joy and the peace which had *filling his own heart.* There was also something which indi *a kind of reckless helplessness* in the fact of leaving that co

of mental agony to be scanned, perhaps, by indifferent eyes. It must have been done in one of those moments when the tortured heart would break if it did not in some mode or other give vent to its anguish. Mr. Lacy, after some minutes' consideration, took out of his pocket a pencil and a bit of paper, and transcribed upon it the lines he had found, and then carefully effaced them from the pillar on which they had been written. As he slowly walked out of the cathedral, and towards Mrs. Denley's house, he revolved in his mind the means by which he would be most likely to gain admission to Mrs. Rodney's presence. It struck him that if she could be made aware that he had read the words that were now in his possession, she would feel less reluctance to enter into communication with him: but it was difficult to convey this fact to her without wounding her feelings. When he reached the house and knocked, he was still undecided as to the course he should pursue. Mary Evans, the girl who was in attendance upon Mrs. Rodney, came to the door; and when Mr. Lacy inquired after Mrs. Rodney's health, answered: "Why, Sir, she says as how she is wonderful better to-day, and so strong that she 's been a getting up and walking about her room; but, I take it, her strength is fever strength, for her cheeks are red as crimson, and she seems as if she could not sit still."

"She should not be allowed to exert herself in that way," observed Mr. Lacy; — "she may do herself much harm."

"Indeed, and that 's quite true, Sir; but there 's no persuading her when she 's in one of her ways. She speaks as gentle as a lamb in common, and never scolds or complains; but when she gets into a tantrum about something as one wants her to do or not to do, she grows to look quite wild like. It 's just now that Mrs. Denley saw you a-coming down the street; and says she to Mrs. Rodney (Mrs. Denley had stepped up to see how the fire was burning, Sir,) — well, says she to Mrs. Rodney, 'There 's Mr. Lacy a-coming down this way Ma'am; I think he 'll be after asking to see you:' and Mrs. Rodney on that turns round and says so sudden, 'If I am to be persecuted in this manner, I shall leave the house at once,' *that Mrs. Denley* let fall the coal-scuttle, and she says as *how it gave her quite* a revulsion. But won't you walk in, Sir?"

"No; I came only to inquire after Mrs. Rodney's health; and as, from what you have just told me, she certainly would not be inclined to see me, I shall send up no message on the subject." And so saying, Mr. Lacy took his departure.

On the Sunday following, a few minutes after the beginning of evening service, he saw, gliding to her usual place, with a noiseless step, the poor woman who during the past week had so much occupied his thoughts. Her shrunken form and flushed cheeks revealed the fatal progress of a disease which betrays its victims all the more surely, by imparting to them, at certain stages of its course, a false strength, that lures them to exertions only serving to accelerate its fearful termination. As Mr. Lacy mounted the pulpit, he breathed an ardent prayer that something in the words he was going to utter might carry a token of peace to this poor creature's breast, a ray of light to her mind. In the course of his sermon he introduced the following sentences: —

"When the heart of man is breaking, and his brain is reeling, to whom should he turn, but to Him who said, 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest?' When the soul of man is shaken, and he feels himself forsaken, to whom should he turn, but to Him who once cried out upon the cross, 'My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?' When phantom forms of horror, and shapeless dreams of terror, assail the soul of man, to whom should he turn, but to Him who was once in such great agony, that his sweat fell like drops of blood upon the earth? When mocking tones of laughter are wildly ringing round him, to whom should he turn, but to Him who was jeered at, and reviled on the cross, because others he saved, but himself he could not save. When death, and hell, and darkness, are driving man to madness, to whom should he turn, but to Him who took from the grave its victory, from death its sting, and from hell its prey? — to Him who died and rose again the third day, in order that death, and hell, and darkness, should never more drive men to madness."

On the evening of this day, Mr. Lacy received the following *note. It seemed* written at once with difficulty and with rapidity, *and in parts* was somewhat illegible.

"If you still wish to see me, Mr. Lacy, — if you are not wearied with vainly seeking admittance to one who is not worthy to wipe the dust from your feet, come to me now. You spoke to me to-day, though you never turned your eyes towards me. I looked into your face, and it seemed to me as if it had been the face of an angel; and when your lips uttered the words that my hand had written, I hung upon your lips. It was as a voice from Heaven; my heart melted within me, and I wept; not as I have often wept, for my eyes are worn out with crying; not tears that scorch the eyelids as they flow, but tears that seem to loosen the iron band that binds my temples, and to melt the dull hard stone in my breast. I came home, and knelt by my bedside — my Prayer-book was in my hand: I opened it, and these words met my eyes, 'The order for the Visitation of the Sick.' I closed the book, and read no more. Mr. Lacy, I am sick in body, and sick at heart. Will you come and visit me? You will not question me; you will not ask me why my sorrow is like no other sorrow; but you will pray for me, and by me. Perhaps you may say some words like this morning's — not words of comfort, words of hope, but words that will make me weep, as I wept then. ELLEN."

The next morning at twelve o' clock, Mr. Lacy was at the door of Mrs. Denley's house. His Prayer-book was in his hand; and as he entered, he slowly pronounced the appointed blessing, "Peace be to this house, and to all that dwell in it." Mrs. Denley led the way up stairs, and opened the door of the room, where Ellen was lying on a sofa, supported by cushions. Her face was paler than the day before, but a sudden flush overspread it as Mr. Lacy entered.

"You are welcome," she said, extending to him at the same time her thin transparent hand. "It is kind of you to come, and kind of you (she added, turning to Mrs. Denley, and to Mary Evans, who were standing by,) to join in these prayers. There are responses to be made, I believe."

Mr. Lacy perceived that she was anxious that he should begin the service at once, without previously entering into conversation *with her; and feeling* deeply himself that no words of his could

bring such powerful consolation to the soul, if burthened with sorrow, or so forcibly awaken the sense of sin, if guilt and remorse were troubling it, as those which the Church supplied him with, he knelt at once by Ellen's couch, and with more emotion than he had perhaps ever felt before in the exercise of this portion of his sacred ministry, he read the solemn prayer for mercy, with which this service opens.

After the Lord's Prayer, in which Ellen had feebly joined, Mr. Lacy and the two women, who knelt opposite to him, repeated alternately the impressive sentences of the Litany, which immediately follows it.

There was something in these supplications that seemed to accord, in some extraordinary manner, with the state of Ellen's mind. When the minister prayed "that her enemy should have no advantage of her," she started convulsively, and gazed wildly about her, as the women responded, "Nor the wicked approach to hurt her." When the words "From the face of her enemy" were uttered, she hid her face in her hands, and a slight shudder shook her frame. After a pause, Mr. Lacy read the prayers that follow, and then rising from his knees, turned towards Ellen, and addressed to her the beautiful and touching exhortation, that forms part of the service; but when towards the end of it — "Forasmuch as after this life there is an account to be given unto the Righteous Judge, by whom all must be judged, without respect of persons" — he required her to examine herself and her estate, both towards God and towards man, so that accusing and condemning herself for her own faults, she might find mercy at our Heavenly Father's hand for Christ's sake, then Ellen trembled. When he rehearsed to her the Apostles' Creed, and asked her if all these articles of the Christian faith she stedfastly believed, she bowed her assent. And now they had arrived at that solemn period in the service when the minister was bound by his sacred office to examine whether she truly repented her of her sins, and was in charity with all the world; — when he was to exhort her to forgive from the bottom of her heart the persons that had *offended her; and if* she had offended any other, to ask of them *forgiveness; and* where she had done injury or wrong to any man

to make amends to the uttermost of her power. He did so in words of awful warning, and at the same time of soothing tenderness; but no answer came from her lips — she turned her face towards the wall; and, to use the expressive words of Holy Scripture, she lifted up her voice and wept.

Mr. Lacy directed Mrs. Denley and Mary Evans to leave him alone with Ellen, but to remain within call in case their presence was required.

When the door was closed he addressed her in the following words: — "Your conscience is troubled with some weighty matter — the heaviness of guilt is on your soul, ay, and that of deep anguish too," he added, as the heart-rending expression of her countenance, which she suddenly turned towards him, revealed the acuteness of her sufferings. "Perhaps, too, you may have been more sinned against than sinning. Perhaps the hand of man has been against you, and you have wandered, young as you are, through the wilderness of the world, and found no rest for the sole of your foot. You have longed, perhaps, like the dove, to flee away and be at rest."

In a hoarse voice Ellen murmured, "There is no peace for the wicked!"

"But there is pardon for the penitent, and peace for the pardoned," rejoined Mr. Lacy.

"Pardoned! pardoned!" exclaimed Ellen, pressing her hand to her forehead, "I shall never feel myself pardoned! Mr. Lacy, I have sometimes opened the Bible, and I have read in it words of pity, words of mercy, words of promise, and for a moment they seemed to bring comfort to my soul; but the dark spirit within me would still whisper, They are not written for thee, — not for thee. O God! O God! when shall I ever feel forgiven?"

"When, laying aside all human pride, all human fears," solemnly replied Mr. Lacy, "in meek distrust of your own judgment, in deep humility of spirit, you make, as the Church requires, a special confession of your sins to one, who, if you truly repent and believe, can absolve you from them, by the authority committed to him by our Lord Jesus Christ."

Ellen listened to these words in deep silence, and Mr. Lacy did not interrupt her meditation. After a long pause, during which she seemed absorbed in the most intense thought, she once more extended her hand to him, and said, "I think, I hope, that a *change has come* over me. Thoughts are crowding upon my mind,

that never came there before, and things begin to appear to m
a new light. Perhaps it is from the approach of death, which si
yesterday has seemed to draw very near to me; and to one who
suffered as I have suffered, death, if it could be robbed of its ter
ought not to be very dreadful. I have often said, 'Would th
could lay myself down and die;' but now, now that I see d
coming in its stern reality, I would fain shrink from it; and
nothing but the cold hand of death will ever still the passio
throbbings of my heart, and teach it to love less wildly, or to l
less fiercely. Forgive me, forgive me, Mr. Lacy! Oh, do
turn away from me! God has sent you to me as an angel of me
not as the minister of his wrath. You bade me confess my s
See, I confess them! I will kneel to you!" and Ellen, in spit
Mr. Lacy's efforts to prevent her, flung herself on the ground at
feet, and clung to them in an agony of tears. He instantly ra
her, and, replacing her on the sofa, with a voice of authc
desired her to be calm, and to compose herself. She obeyed,
in a few minutes, and with an altered manner, she again addres
him. "I cannot confess my sins without revealing the histor
my life; my guilt and my sorrows are so closely linked toget
that they cannot be separated: but I wish to keep no secret f
you—you have brought a vision of peace and of hope before
and perhaps, when you know how miserable I have been, th
how guilty, you may not think me utterly unworthy of it."

"None are unworthy of pardon in the eyes of our adc
Saviour," said Mr. Lacy, "who heartily repent and sue for it
remember that we must forgive as we hope to be forgiven."

"Since I have seen you and heard you," said Ellen, '
pray, I dare pray, and I will pray that God may change my
and teach me to forgive as I hope to be forgiven: and now
not strong enough to speak much at a time, and that I wish
my heart to you without reserve, I will put into your h
history of my life, which, during days of solitude and r
weary watchings, I have written—and which will disclos
all the secrets of my soul; it is the most complete confess
make. When you have read it, Mr. Lacy, you will retu
By that time, perhaps, the grace of God will have c
storms within me, and I may then hear from your lips
words of absolution."

The following history was contained in the mar
Mr. Lacy carried home with him.

ELLEN MIDDLETON.

CHAPTER I.

"What thousand voices pass through all the rooms,'
What cries and hurries!
* * * * * *
My cousin's death sits heavy on my conscience; hark!
* * * * * *
In every room confusion, they 're all mad,
Most certain all stark mad within the house."

BEAUMONT AND FLETCHER.

I WAS born and educated in the house of my uncle, Mr. Middleton, one of the wealthiest squires in D—shire. He had received my mother with kindness and affection, on her return from India, where she had lost her husband and her eldest child. She was his youngest and favourite sister, and when after having given birth to a daughter she rapidly declined in health, and soon after expired, bequeathing that helpless infant to his protection, he silently resolved to treat it as his own, and, like most resolutions formed in silence, it was religiously adhered to. At the time of my birth, my uncle was about forty years old; a country gentleman in the most respectable sense of the word.

Devoted to the improvement of his tenants on the one hand, and to that of his estate on the other; zealous as a magistrate, active as a farmer, charitable towards the poor, and hospitable towards the rich, he was deservedly popular with his neighbours, and much looked up to in his county. He had been attached in his youth to the daughter of a clergyman of eminent abilities and high character, who resided in the neighbourhood of Elmsley. For six years his father had opposed his intended marriage with Miss Selby, and when at the end of that time he extorted from him

a reluctant consent, it was too late to press his suit; she was dying of a hopeless decline, and to cheer her few remaining days of life by every token of the most devoted affection, and after her death to mourn deeply and silently over the wreck of his early hopes, was the conclusion of an attachment to which Mr. Middleton had looked, as to the source and means of all his future happiness. At the age of thirty-five he became possessed, by his father's death, of the manor-house of Elmsley, and of the large property adjoining to it. In the happiness which his wealth gave him the means of diffusing around him, in the friendly attachment with which he was regarded by those among whom he now fixed his residence, he found subjects of interest, and sources of gratification, which gradually obliterated the traces of his early affliction.

From what I have already said, it will be plainly perceived that my uncle was a man that one could not fail to esteem; though whether or not it was as easy to love him, may be questioned. To the strictest principles of religious morality, he added a heart full of kind feeling for others, and an invariable serenity of temper, but an unconquerable reserve, a want of confidence in others, and an absence of sympathy in their tastes and pursuits, interfered with the expression, if not with the existence, of those affections, which his merits and his kindness would otherwise have been so well calculated to inspire. I never remember his taking the slightest interest in any of my childish pleasures, or his uttering any but the most formal phrase of commendation when my performances were submitted to his inspection. Young as I was, I felt this want of sympathy, in the only person who was really interested in my welfare, and would have gladly agreed to be less calmly reproved when I was wrong, and more warmly praised when I was right.

Till the age of six years old, I am not conscious of having loved any human being. From accidental circumstances my nurses had been so often changed, that I had not had the opportunity of attaching myself to any of them; and as to my uncle, I believe he *might have left* Elmsley for days, weeks, or months, without *causing me the slightest* sensation of regret or solitude. He di

not often absent himself from home, but on one occasion he did so for three months, and a few days before his return, my nurse informed me that he was married, and that I should soon see my new aunt. The announcement caused me neither pleasure nor pain; and curiosity was the only feeling with which I anticipated the arrival so eagerly looked forward to by the whole of my uncle's establishment. When Mrs. Middleton arrived I was immediately summoned into the drawing-room. The tenderness of her manner, the expressions of fondness with which she greeted me; the emotion which her countenance betrayed, were all so totally different from anything that I had ever witnessed, that I felt as if a being from another world had come among us. There was something heavenly in the expression of her countenance, there was something original in every word she uttered; in her gaiety there was a bubbling joyousness, an intense enjoyment in enjoyment, that was irresistibly attractive, and in sorrow or in emotion, her tears fell unconsciously from her eyes, and would trickle down her cheeks without any of the disfiguring grimaces which usually attend the act of weeping. I loved her from the first instant I saw her, and my childish heart clung to her with all the strength of feeling that had lain dormant in it during the first years of my existence. To use a familiar expression, we took to each other instantaneously; I do not know that she was fond of children, as it is called; she did not stop to caress those we met in our walks, and of romping and noise she grew very soon weary; but there was so much originality in her understanding, and so much simplicity in her character; she was so in earnest about every employment and amusement which she admitted me to share, that, superior as she was, I never felt that she was making an effort to bring herself down to my level, and consequently in her society never experienced the weariness which children are apt to feel, from those flat and unprofitable attempts to amuse them, which are so often made and so often fail. She required sympathy; it was as necessary to her as the air of heaven, and what she so much needed herself, she amply yielded to others. I never met in my *life with any one who* entered into the feelings of those about her *as she did.*

Altogether, she was a person more calculated to diffuse happiness than to enjoy it; perhaps to inspire more enthusiastic feelings of affection, than she herself often experienced. Be that as it may, she opened a new era in the history of my childhood; and, during the six or seven years that followed the epoch of my uncle's marriage, my life was as happy as that of a human creature can be. About a year after that event, Mrs. Middleton was confined of a girl, and this circumstance, far from diminishing my happiness, served but to increase it. My aunt was not a person capable of being engrossed by an infant, and though greatly pleased at the birth of her little girl, her affection for me suffered no diminution. The cares which little Julia required — the task of entertaining her, which often fell to my share — formed a delightful amusement; and I do not remember, till the time when she was eight and I fifteen, having ever felt, or, indeed, having had cause to feel, one jealous pang on her account.

Mrs. Middleton took great pains with my education, — at least with those parts of it which were congenial to her taste and mine; for, to follow with ardour whatever was the impulse and fancy of the moment, was at once the charm and the danger of my aunt's character. She could not resist the temptation of initiating me, perhaps too early, into those studies which captivate the imagination and excite the feelings. German and Italian we studied together. The most romantic parts of history — all that was most interesting and bewitching in poetry, furnished materials for those hours which we devoted to reading. Reading! that most powerful instrument in the education of the heart! — silently searching into its secrets, rousing its dormant passions, and growing sometimes itself into a passion! But there was scarcely less excitement in conversing with my aunt, than in reading with her. She never took a common-place view of any subject, or shrunk from expressing her real opinion upon it, whatever it might be. With regard to her own feelings, she took nothing for granted; she never persuaded herself (as so many people do) that, because it *would* be *right* or desirable to feel and to act in a particular *manner, she did so* feel and act, while her conscience bore witness *to the contrary.* She was a great searcher into motives, and fea

fully true in her judgment of people and of things: had not her character been one of the noblest, and her mind one of the purest that ever woman was gifted with, there would have been something startling in the boldness of her opinions, and in the candour of her admissions. Had she been within reach of any associates whose feelings and understandings were in any way congenial to her own, she would not, in all probability, have treated me, rather as a pupil and companion, than as an intimate friend. She would not have poured out her thoughts to me with the most unbounded confidence, or taught me to feel that I was essential to her happiness; but, as it was, (for at Elmsley she had neighbours and acquaintances, but no friends,) she did all this, and the intense gratification which I derived from my constant intercourse with one whom I loved with the tenderest affection, kept me in a state of highly wrought excitement, which, while it subdued, and even effaced, the trivial faults of that early age, exercised on my character an influence far from beneficial to my future happiness. One of the subjects on which Mrs. Middleton would often speak to me with eagerness and eloquence, was the self-deception with which most people persuade themselves that their affections flow in their most natural channels, without proving their own feelings by the stern test of *reality*. Fully aware of her partiality to me; aware, too, how unattractive a child my cousin Julia was, and how unsuited to my aunt's nature and taste must be the cold, sluggish, selfish disposition which her daughter evinced, and which she seemed painfully alive to, I never for an instant doubted that her affection for me exceeded in kind, as well as in degree, that which she felt for her own child. Often would she lament to me that Julia gave no promise of future excellence of mind or character; that in her she never expected to find the sympathy, the responsive tenderness, that characterised our intimacy, and which shed such a charm over every detail of life. The selfishness inherent in the human heart, superadded to the exclusive nature of a passionate attachment, made me listen to these forebodings with a secret satisfaction, laying, meanwhile, the flattering unction to my soul, that nothing but the purest spirit of devoted tenderness *led me to rejoice that* I could fill a place in my aunt's affections,

which would prevent her suffering from the disappointment which my cousin's repulsive and apathetic disposition would otherwise have caused to a heart as warm, and a spirit as ardent, as hers.

A few years (the happiest of my life) carried me rapidly to the verge of womanhood. I attained my fifteenth year, and began to form acquaintances, and to mix in the society which occasionally met at Elmsley. It chiefly consisted of relations of my uncle and of Mrs. Middleton, who came at certain intervals, and spent a few weeks at the old Priory, which then became the scene of more active amusements than were customary in our usually retired mode of life. Edward Middleton, a nephew of my uncle, and Henry Lovell, a younger brother of my aunt, who were college friends and constant associates, were among our most frequent visitors. The latter, who had lost his mother several years before the time I am speaking of, and whose father held a situation in one of the government offices, which obliged him to remain in London almost all the year round, had been in the habit of spending first his holidays from Eton, and subsequently the Oxford vacations, with his sister at Elmsley. There he formed an acquaintance with Edward Middleton, which soon grew into a close intimacy; and both at college and at Elmsley they were inseparable. As it so often happens in such cases, there was hardly any perceptible bond of sympathy between them; they were so strikingly dissimilar in character and in tastes, that one could scarcely understand the pleasure they took in each other's society. It is necessary to the subsequent unfolding of my story that I should give some account of them, and of the feelings with which I regarded, at that time, these two men. They were both several years older than myself, but the disparity was not enough to prevent my considering them as friends and companions. They had both left Oxford some two or three years before the time I am speaking of. Henry Lovell was at once like and unlike his sister, Mrs. Middleton; he was exceedingly attractive; there was no denying the charm that existed in the rapid intelligence, the quick conception, and the ready humour that lit up his eyes and countenance, and sparkled in his repartee. His powers of captivation *were as great as* hers, but he knew that power, and ever used it

for an end; while in her it was spontaneous as the bubbling of a stream, as the song of the birds, or as the joy of childhood. Both had a keen perception of the ludicrous, but in her it never amounted to ill-nature: she was as severe upon herself as he was upon others; while she penetrated into their motives she judged them kindly, and was as ready to detect evil in her own heart as he was to suspect it in theirs. His smile was sarcastic, and his remarks were often bitter. If he had not been charming, he would have been odious; and to have been loved at all, he must have been passionately loved, for no feeling short of passion could have withstood the withering influence of his profound selfishness. He was well versed in the language of feeling, in the theory of enthusiasm; he could speak of "whatsoever things are pure, of whatsoever things are lovely, of whatsoever things are honest, of whatsoever things are of good report." Where there was virtue, and where there was praise, there was he ready to descant with eloquence, to discuss with ability; there he was at home, at least in conversation, for, in the varied range of human affections, his intellect conceived what his heart did not feel.

At the time that I am writing of, when he and Edward Middleton were the two persons who most occupied my thoughts, and interested my girlish imagination, it would have been difficult for me to describe what I thought of each. For Edward I felt an involuntary respect, which made me shrink from expressing, before him, any opinion, or any sentiment which he was likely to condemn; he seemed inclined to judge me with peculiar severity, and I sometimes felt provoked at the calm sternness of his manner on these occasions, especially on comparing it with the smiling indifference with which he would listen to Henry Lovell's satirical remarks, which I secretly felt to be more deserving of blame than my own thoughtless observations, little as I could withstand myself the extraordinary fascination which his peculiar tone of mind and conversation exercised on those about him.

In the summer of the year 18—, my cousin Julia had a long *and severe illness.* For some days she lay at the point of death;

and, for the first time in my life, I saw the expression of anguish in the face I loved best in the world. Mrs. Middleton's grief seemed out of proportion with the degree of affection she had hitherto apparently felt for her child; and there was a wildness in her sorrow which surprised as much as it affected me. Long afterwards, it struck me that something of remorse, at the preference she had so openly shown for me, and at the coldness with which she had regarded her daughter, might have added to the misery she then experienced. But, at the time, this idea never occurred to me; I thought I had underrated the strength of my aunt's feelings, and only wondered at the intensity of an affection which had never betrayed itself to that extent before.

After a few anxious days and nights, my cousin rallied, and by degrees recovered; but did not regain the state of robust health which she had previously enjoyed. My aunt's devotion to her was unceasing: she patiently watched over her, and attended to every wish and fancy that she expressed. Julia's temper, which had never been good, grew gradually worse; and it required all a mother's forbearance to endure her continual waywardness and caprice. She had never seemed to feel much affection for me, but now her indifference grew into positive dislike, and nothing I could say or do ever succeeded in pleasing her. When left in my charge, she would invariably insist upon doing something or other which I was obliged to prohibit or prevent; and the slightest opposition to her will would instantly produce such fits of passion, and of crying, that my aunt at her return found her frequently in such a state of hysterical nervousness, or else so pale and exhausted by her own violence, that it was some time before she could be restored to anything like calmness or good-humour. I can truly say that I made every possible effort to gain the affection of my little cousin, and I was seldom betrayed into any irritable expression, or sign of impatience, much as I was daily and hourly tried.

Once or twice I had observed an expression of displeasure in Mrs. Middleton's countenance, on overhearing Julia's screams, on some of the occasions alluded to; and I had sometimes noticed a sudden cloud pass over her brow, and an abrupt change in her *manner, at the moments* when she was on the point of giving ut-

terance to those expressions of tenderness which she was wont to bestow upon me: but that tenderness was so evident; it had been spoken in words; it had been proved by deeds; I had read it in every look of her eyes; I had traced it in every tone of her voice, during so many years, that I should as soon have doubted that the rays of the sun cheered and warmed me, as that my aunt loved me.

I am now come to an epoch of my life, the events of which, in their minutest details, are engraved on my memory as if a burning iron had stamped them on my brain. I will not anticipate, but, with unflinching resolution, record every particular of the day which changed me from a happy child into a miserable woman.

Some description of Elmsley Priory is requisite to the understanding of my story, and I will endeavour to make it short and clear.

The house itself, formerly a monastery, was built on the brow of a steep hill; irregular in shape, it seemed to have been added to, bit by bit, according to the increasing size of the convent. A verandah or balcony of modern date, followed the sinuosities of the old pile, and, from its peculiar position, while at one extremity it was on a level with the grounds, at the other it overhung a precipitous declivity. This bank shelved down to the edge of a rapid stream, which chafed and foamed along the base of the hill against which the house stood.

At one of the ends of the verandah was a rough flight of stone steps, much overgrown with moss, at all times difficult to descend, and, after rain, positively dangerous, from the slippery nature of the footing it afforded. It led to the edge of the river down the bank already described. A longer and more circuitous path began at the opposite extremity of the verandah, and ended at the same point.

The view which this balcony commanded was one of the most beautiful that can be conceived; and in the first freshness of a spring morning, in the intense heat and repose of a summer noon, in the glorious beauty of an autumnal sunset, or in the grandeur of a wintry storm, we were wont to stand and revel in the varying *aspects which this lovely* landscape presented to our eyes. It was

a combination of wood, stream, and mountain, with a few cottages scattered here and there, as if a painter's hand had placed them where they stood. Altogether, they formed a picture which the eye loved to dwell upon, and which memory strives to recall.

It was on one of those glorious days, when existence in itself, and apart from all other circumstances, is felt to be a blessing, that I stood leaning against one of the pillars of the gallery I have described.

There had been a thunder-storm, and torrents of rain, in the night, but then the sky was perfectly cloudless; that thin transparent haze, which in England sobers without obscuring the brightness of a hot sunny day, hung lightly on the horizon; the lights and shades played in the stream below, and the busy hum of insects was the only sound that reached my ears. The rose of May, and the slender jessamine, twined round the pilasters, near which I stood. They were giving out all their sweetness, and seemed to be rearing their graceful heads again, after the storm that had so rudely shaken them.

I had thrown back my bonnet, to enjoy more completely the warm perfumed breeze; and was so absorbed by the beauty of the scene, that it was only on being called to for the second time, that I turned round, and saw Julia, standing on the edge of the stone parapet, with her arm round one of the columns. The dangerous nature of her position immediately struck me; I told her to come down, and, on her refusing to do so, took hold of her, and placed her on the ground. She instantly set up one of her loudest screams, and, exclaiming that I had hurt her, she rushed past me, and ran into the drawing-room, one of the recesses of which formed an angle in the building. A small paned latticed window, which opened on the verandah, was at this moment imperfectly closed, and from the spot where I stood, I could hear every word that was spoken in that recess. I heard Julia complaining to her mother of my unkindness, in a voice broken by sobs, and tremulous with passion. The child's statement of the facts that had led to my interference, was totally false; for an instant I felt inclined to follow *her, in order* to contradict it, but the bane of my nature, *pride, which always* made me hate an explanation or a justification, re-

strained the impulse, and I then caught the sound of Mrs. Middleton's voice; she was speaking in a low earnest manner to her husband.

"This cannot last," she was saying; "it cannot be suffered to last; these children must be separated, and the sooner the better."

"But what can be done?" was the reply; "Ellen has no home but this."

I listened breathlessly for the answer. It seemed to me, at that moment, as if my life depended upon it; my breath seemed to stop, and my whole frame to quiver.

"She might go to some good school for a year or two," was the answer: "it would be painful to decide on such a step; but nothing can signify to us in comparison with Julia's health." I did not hear any more, but, snatching up my bonnet, I rushed along the verandah till I came to its farthest extremity. I knelt, and leant my head against the stones of the parapet. Every vein in my brow seemed swelled to bursting, and I felt as if I had waked from a happy dream to a state of things which my understanding could scarcely master.

Was it indeed my aunt? was it Mrs. Middleton? who had spoken of sending me away from her — away from Elmsley? Was it she that had said I was *nothing* to her in comparison with the selfish child whom, for her sake alone, I had endured? It was even so — I was *nothing* to her; I felt convinced of it at once; and it seemed to me in that moment as if a sudden chill struck to my heart, and crept through my whole frame. I have often wondered whether the sensation of moral suffering is as nearly allied to physical pain in every one else as in myself. The expression of an *aching* heart has always appeared to me to have a literal as well as a figurative sense; there is a sort of positive pain that accompanies certain kinds of mental sufferings, different in its nature from the feeling of grief, even in its highest degree; and disappointment in its various forms is perhaps the species of suffering which generally produces it.

I was, at the moment I have described, experiencing this kind of pain in its acutest shape. I felt reluctant to move from where I *stood; the sound of my* own quick breathing was oppressive to me.

My eyes were closed, that the light of the sun, in all its glorious brightness, should not reach me. The sounds, the smells, that I was enjoying a few minutes before, were growing intolerable to me. No voice could then have been welcome to me (for the voice I loved best, the voice that had ever spoken peace and joy to my heart, I had just heard utter words that had destroyed at one blow the fabric of bliss which my heart had so long reared for itself); no voice, I say, could have been welcome to me; but when I heard the sharp and querulous tones of Julia, God in mercy forgive me for what I felt. She was again standing at the head of the stone steps, that I have described as forming one of the extremities of the verandah; and as she placed her foot on one of the moss-covered slippery steps, she called out, "I 'm going down — I 'll have my own way now." I seized her hand, and, drawing her back, exclaimed, "Don't, Julia!" on which she said, "You had better not teaze me; you are to be sent away if you teaze me." I felt as if a viper had stung me; the blood rushed to my head, and I struck her; — she reeled under the blow, her foot slipped, and she fell headlong down the stone steps. A voice near me said, "She has killed her!" There was a plunge in the water below; her white frock rose to the surface — sunk — rose again — and sunk to rise no more. Two men rushed wildly down the bank, and one of them turned and looked up as he passed. I heard a piercing scream — a mother's cry of despair. Nobody said again "She has killed her." 'I did not die — I did not go mad, for I had not an instant's delusion — I never doubted the reality of what had happened; but those words — "She has killed her!" "She has killed her!" — were written as with a fiery pencil on my brain, and day and night they rang in my ears. Who had spoken them?

There was the secret of my fate!

CHAPTER II.

"Whence is that knocking?
How is 't with me when every noise appals me;
What hands are here? Ha! they pluck out mine eyes.
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand?" SHAKSPEARE.

"In the wind there is a voice
Shall forbid thee to rejoice;
And to thee shall night deny
All the quiet of her sky;
And the day shall have a sun
Which shall make thee wish it done." BYRON.

I KNOW not how long I remained in the same place, rooted to the spot, the blood rushing at one instant with such violence to my head, that it seemed as if it would burst from my temples; and the next I felt a cold sweat on my forehead, and a horrible fear creeping over my heart. I could not move, and my tongue clave to the roof of my mouth; my eyes felt as if they were starting out of my head, and I sought to close them and could not. There was that torrent before them; it roared, it foamed; and the foam looked like a shroud; and the roaring of the waters sounded like a scream; and I screamed too—a dreadful scream—and then all at once I grew calm; for there were hurried steps on the gallery, and terror paralysed me. It was the housekeeper and the doctor; as they came, the latter said: — "Take the other child to her, — perhaps she will cry when she sees her." And as I was trembling violently, and did not seem to hear what they said to me, though I did hear every word, the man took me up in his arms, and carried me like a baby into the drawing-room. Mrs. Middleton was there with a face paler than a sheet; when she saw me her mouth quivered, but she did not speak or cry; she waved her hand, and then laid her head again against the open door, and seemed to listen with her heart. I felt as if I could hear it beat where I sat. Five or six minutes passed, and then Mr. Middleton rushed into the room. She looked up into his face and shrieked—the same fearful shriek I had *heard once before.* He took her hands, which she was *wringing wildly, and* putting his arm round her, he whispered,

"Now, Mary, all is over; show me that you believe in God." She struggled for a moment, her chest heaved convulsively, and then she burst into a violent fit of hysterical crying. He supported her out of the room, and they went away together. The housekeeper came up to the sofa where I was, and taking one of my hands, she said, "And where were you when the poor thing fell?"

I started up as if she had shot me; I rushed out of the room, across the hall, through the winding passages, and up the stairs into my own room. I locked the door, and falling on my knees with my face against the bed-post, I pressed my temples with my hands as if to still their throbbing. During the next two or three hours, each knock at my door made me jump as if a cannon had gone off at my ear; each time I opened it I expected to be accused of Julia's death,—to be told that I had killed her; and once, when it was my uncle's step that I heard approaching, I opened my window, and was on the point of throwing myself out of it: strange to say, the only thing that stopped me was the fear of adding to Mrs. Middleton's anguish. I suppose it was the excessive terror that I felt of being denounced, or of betraying myself, that saved me from a brain fever; the very intensity of this anxiety subdued the extravagance of my despair, and I calmed myself that I might appear calm. I took some food, because I instinctively felt that I needed strength and support. It never occurred to me, it never once crossed my mind, to reveal what I had done. I felt that if any one accused me, I must have died on the spot—fled, destroyed myself—I know not what; but at the same time there was a rigid determination in my soul, that as in the first moments that had followed Julia's death, I *could* not, so now I *would* not, speak. Each hour that elapsed confirmed this resolution; for every hour that passed by in silence, every word that was uttered by me, or before me, on the subject, made the act of self-accusation grow into a moral impossibility.

When it became dusk the solitude of my room grew intolerable to me, and I wandered through the house seeking for companionship, and yet starting off in a different direction, if the sound of *steps or of voices* drew near to me. At last I found my way *observed into the* drawing-room, and sat there, or paced up

down for a length of time, till at last the door opened, and my uncle came in.

He walked up to me, laid his hand on my shoulder, and said, in a voice of subdued emotion "You are now our only child, Ellen."

I suppose my countenance bore a very wild expression at that moment, for he looked at me with surprise, and then added in a still more soothing manner, "Go to your aunt, my dear Ellen; she will not feel herself childless while you are spared to us."

A choking sensation rose in my throat, and a cold sweat stood on my forehead, but I got up, and walked resolutely to my aunt's room.

She was overwhelmed with grief; her hands were feverish, and her head burning. I sat down by her, and silently employed myself in bathing her temples with cold water. She now and then laid her aching head on my shoulder, and burst into an agony of crying, which seemed to relieve her.

She asked me where my uncle was; and I could have told her, for I had heard the servants say, as I was coming up stairs, that he was returning to the river side, to make one search more after the body of his child.

The moon was shining brightly, and several men were employed in dragging the deep and rapid stream; I pointed that way, and she seemed at once to understand me, for a deep groan was her only answer. Once she said, "Pray for me, Ellen;" and then for the first time remorse took its place by the side of terror in my mind. I felt I could not pray — no exactly-defined idea of guilt presented itself to my mind, and yet there was a murmur in my ears, the burden of which was, "She has killed her — she has killed her;" (and as when standing on a dizzy height, with a firm hold on some railing or plank of support, something whispers to one, "If I should let it go!") I felt afraid that the next moment I should say out loud, "I have killed her."

The idea of prayer made me tremble. Once I said mechanically, "O God! forgive me," and then shuddered. It sounded to myself like a confession of murder. I dared not address God as I had done the day before. One instant I thought of myself as of

a guilty wretch, unworthy to live, unworthy to lift up her voice in prayer, or to raise her eyes to the calm and cloudless sky. At other times I felt as if God had dealt too hardly with me: I pitied myself, and my heart waxed rebellious in its grief. I said to myself, like Cain, "My punishment is greater than I can bear;" and then I almost cursed myself for having thought of Cain — for I had not murdered my cousin, though somebody said I had killed her. For one instant anger had maddened me; without thought, without intention, I had struck her — one hasty blow was given, and now my youth was blighted, my peace of mind was gone; the source of all pure joys, of all holy thoughts, was dried up within me. I should never stand again in the sacred silence of the solemn night, and feel as if its whispering winds were bringing tidings from a better world to my soul. And in those days of glowing beauty, when streams of light intoxicate the eye, when all nature breaks into song, or blossoms into flower, never again should I feel myself as in past years, a part of that bright creation, longing only, in the fulness of my heart, to prostrate myself in fervent adoration before Him who gave to the birds and to the streams a voice to praise Him; to the glorious heavens a charge to magnify Him; and to man, enthusiasm, emotion, poetry, music — *all* that lifts the soul above itself and the material world around it, to the wide fields of enraptured contemplation.

But now a chain would evermore weigh down my spirits — a dark remembrance would ever stand between me and the sunny skies — a tone, as of the dying and the dead, would ever mingle with the sounds of melody, with the voice of love, with the words of affection. Yes —

> "All bright hopes and hues of day
> Had faded into twilight grey;"

or rather into the darkness of night. I wept over myself, over my blighted youth, my destroyed happiness, my lost innocence — and I was only sixteen!

There I sat, that long night through; my aunt had sunk into *the heavy slumber* of exhaustion, her hand in mine, her head on *my shoulder.* I dared not move — scarcely breathe; not scarce

tears were slowly chasing each other down my cheeks, and the storm within was raging wildly in my breast — but I did not pray; I could not: a sheet of lead seemed to stretch itself between me and Heaven; and when the light of day broke slowly into the chamber of mourning, I closed my eyes, not to see the sun in its calm majesty, dawning on the first day of my changed existence.

The first days that follow a great and sudden misfortune carry with them a kind of excitement that keeps off for a time the stunning sense of desolation from the soul. My uncle returned on the following morning, bearing with him the body of his child, which he had at length succeeded in rescuing from the bed of the torrent, which had carried it down far below Elmsley.

The preparations for the interment in the village church seemed to rouse the afflicted parents to exertions, that, though intimately connected with the loss that had befallen them, were almost a relief to Mrs. Middleton, after the inactivity of the last twenty-four hours.

I had hardly left her room all day, and when she told me that my uncle expected us all to meet him at dinner, I felt it would be impossible to go through the trial; but, as she was going to make the exertion, I could not refuse to follow her.

When we entered the drawing-room together, Edward Middleton and Henry Lovell were both standing before the fire-place. It was well for me that our meeting took place while the catastrophe of the day before was so recent, that the agitation I betrayed could pass under the garb of sorrow and nervousness. I was trembling violently; I felt a degree of conviction, that amounted to moral certainty, that one of those two men had witnessed the frightful scene, which resembled more a hideous dream than an actual reality. Both were coming to me with outstretched hands. Could they *both* mean to take mine? Did not one of them know what that hand had done? A mist rose before my eyes, and I fainted.

When my senses returned, I found myself in bed, my aunt by my side, and a number of restoratives employed to bring me back from my swoon. I recovered, and the next morning, on awaking after some hours of feverish and restless sleep, I heard a noise in the court under my windows.

I rose hastily, and saw the funeral procession moving slowly from the house across the grounds, and taking its way towards the village church. The little coffin was carried by four of the grey-headed servants of the house; my uncle and aunt were walking on foot beside it, and my cousin and Henry Lovell were following them. The rest of the servants, among whom was Julia's nurse, and almost all the inhabitants of the village, closed the procession. I watched the funeral train till it was out of sight, and for the first time I forgot myself, for a few minutes, and my own dreadful share in this calamity, and thought only of my aunt, and of her misery. I called to mind too the image of that child, whom I had so often nursed to sleep in her infancy, whom I had carried in my arms, and held to my bosom. When I pictured to myself the little body laid in its narrow grave, and thought how short a time ago life was strong within it, and that it was *my* hand that had sent her to her watery grave, my agony grew so intense that I wonder it did not kill me, or drive me to some desperate act of madness. It did not; and pity for myself soon hardened my heart against the sufferings of others. I ceased to weep for Julia; she was dead indeed; but was not death a blessing compared to such a life as mine would be? My aunt had lost her child; but was not her sorrow as nothing in comparison with mine — mine, who had made her childless? And now a sudden thought flashed on my brain. Why was I at home? Why was I alone? Did they suspect me? Had the master of my fate, the witness of my crime, warned them to keep the murderess away from the grave of their child? Was I already become as a monster to them? Did they loathe the sight of me? Would they send me to prison? or would they turn me out of their house; and should I fly along dusty roads, and through dark alleys and crowded streets, and would the mob follow, as I once read that they followed a woman who was thought to have murdered her child, and point at me, and hoot, and groan, and cry "There goes the wretch that murdered the child?" I fell on my knees; it seemed as if there was a sound of footsteps behind me — a shout of execration in my ears. It was a waking nightmare; I was growing delirious, and when I felt something *touch me, and a* warm breath on my shoulders, I gave a piercing

scream, and fell with my face on the ground. A low moaning roused me from this state. I looked up and saw my great Newfoundland dog, who always slept in my room; he was licking my hands and neck. His kind eyes were looking at me from under the rough hair that shaded them; and he moaned gently as he did so. I was still *almost* a child, for I suppose that none but a child would have found comfort in this creature's mute sympathy. As it was, I flung my arms wildly round its neck, and sobbed. He did not struggle, but patiently stood there, though my tears were falling fast on his head. "Poor, poor Hector! you never will be told what I have done; you never will turn away from me with horror, though all the world should do so. Poor, poor Hector! my good, my kind dog!" This little incident had done me good, and the tears I had shed had relieved me. I dressed myself, and when my aunt entered my room at her return from the funeral — when she embraced me with much emotion — when she told me how she and my uncle had hoped that I might have slept over the last trying hour — when she tenderly reproached me for having left my bed — when she drew me to her, and, parting the hair that hung loosely and heavily on my forehead, laid her cold hand upon it, and then pressed me to her bosom — I felt a relief that for the moment *almost* resembled joy. Under the influence of this momentary reaction I followed her to the dining-room, where we found my uncle sitting in mournful silence; he pressed my hand as I approached him, and we all sat down to eat, or try to eat, the breakfast prepared for us. This melancholy meal over, I withdrew to the furthest end of the drawing-room, and sat down at my embroidery frame, which stood near to an open window, and began to work with something like composure. From this moment everything about us resumed its former aspect, and the habits of our daily life seemed to have experienced scarcely any change. My uncle's reserve and gloom were, perhaps, somewhat deeper than before; and Mrs. Middleton at times gave way to uncontrollable bursts of grief; but her elastic spirit, bowed down for awhile by the pressure of sorrow, rose again with the buoyancy which affliction can repress, but hardly destroy in a nature like hers, to which happiness seemed almost a condition of existence. A sorrow which

would have broken this spring within her must have killed her — but this did not; and the full flow of her affections seemed to return in what had once appeared to be their natural channel — she clung to me with a fondness that seemed every hour to increase. Superior as she was, there was about her a kind of dependence upon others — upon their love and their sympathy — which was inexpressibly endearing. In those early times of sorrow I received her caresses, and listened to the words of love which she addressed to me, with something of the spirit with which I can imagine that the Holy Françoise de Chantal may have pressed to her bosom the burning cross, that stamped upon her breast the sign of salvation,* — at once the object of intense adoration and the instrument of acute torture.

My cousin and Henry Lovell staid on at Elmsley, and nothing, in the manner of either, gave me the least clue to discover which was the possessor of my dreadful secret. Both were kind to me, and both seemed to regard me with more interest than usual. In Edward's countenance I sometimes read a look of severity, which made the blood forsake my heart; but then at other times his voice was so gentle in speaking to me, his countenance had so much sweetness in it, as he turned his eyes full upon me, that I felt reassured, though, at the same time, intensely miserable.

With Henry I felt more at my ease — why I cannot tell, but he was the only person with whom, since the fatal day of Julia's death, I could speak in the same manner as I did before. There was something soothing to my wayward feelings in the thoughtless gaiety which he soon resumed. In the course of a few weeks I persuaded myself nearly, if not entirely, that fancy, allied with terror, had conjured up, in that fatal hour, the cry which had sounded in my ears; at least I pacified my fears by repeating this supposition to myself. It was like a sedative, that numbs without removing the pain we feel. It made me better able to endure what I had to go through. Church was a terrible ordeal to me. I went of an afternoon only, for several following Sundays, because I could not bear to hear the commandments read; and yet I hated myself for

* *Madame de* Chantal, the Founder of the Order of the Visitation, *impressed upon her* breast, with a burning iron, the sign of the cross.

my weakness. One Sunday morning Edward said to me, across the breakfast-table, "Pray, Ellen, have you made a vow never to go to church of a morning?" I felt myself turning pale, but answered quietly, "I am going now;" and I went, and God only knows what I suffered there.

Riding grew into a passion with me at that time. There is such excitement in the rapid motion — in the impatience of the animal that bears one along — in the sense of power — in the feeling of life, which is never so strong within one, as when, over a common, or a wild muir, one can dash along at the horse's full speed, with the wind in one's face, and the turf under one's feet, In every weather I rode; the more heavily it rained, the more wildly it blew, the more I enjoyed excursions that lasted several hours, and after which I returned home, fatigued in body, excited in mind, and able to sleep at night from sheer exhaustion. Henry was my constant companion on these occasions, and indulged every fancy I formed, as to the length and direction of these excursions. He applauded my courage when, arrested by no obstacles, I cleared fence after fence, or waded through rapid streams, in order to arrive, a quarter of an hour sooner, at some point I had fixed upon. His talent for conversation was great, and he possessed the art of captivating the attention to an extraordinary degree. Intercourse with him became to me, in a moral point of view, what riding was in a physical. It was an exercise of the mental faculties, that stilled the process of self-tormenting within me. He admired me — I saw it plainly, and far more than he had done before the change that had come over me; at least I fancied so; and one day, as I was turning over the leaves of a blotting-paper book, in the library, I found the following verses: —

"She was a child, and in her dreamless eyes
There slept a world of unawakened thought —
And in her voice, her laughter, and her sighs,
No spirit lingered, and no magic wrought;
For as the haze that veils the glorious skies
At morning prime; or as the mist that lies
On ocean's might: or as the solemn hour
Of Nature's silence, when the Heavens lower,
Such was her childhood; but its hour is past;
The veil is drawn, the mist has cleared at last.

And what though with a storm! Who does not find
In wind, in waves, in Nature's wildest strife
With things material, or in man's own mind,
A deeper and more glorious sense of life
Than in the calm of silent apathy?
Who would not stand within the Sun's full blaze,
Though scorched and dazzled by his burning rays?
Oh, we can watch with ardent sympathy,
The stormy floods of rising passion roll
Their swelling surges o'er the silent soul!
And we can gaze exulting on the brow
Where restless thoughts and new, are crowding now:
Each throb, each struggle, serving but to feed
The flame of genius, and the source of thought.
Be mine the task, be mine the joy, to read
Each mood, each change, by time and feeling wrought,
And as the mountain stream reflects the light
That shoots athwart the sky's tempestuous track,
So shall my soul, her soul's impassioned might,
As in a broken mirror, image back."

I read these lines with a strange mixture of sensations. "Does he know the truth?" was my first thought; and it made the blood rush to my cheeks. The next was, "Whether he knows it or not, he admires me." I smiled with bitterness indeed, but still I smiled; and as I read these verses, over and over again, they seemed to change the current of my feelings. For the first time, I said to myself, "There are things in the world yet worth living for, besides those I have forfeited — peace of mind, and an untroubled conscience. — There is genius, which, as he says, thrives in the atmosphere of suffering; there is the power which genius gives to 'ride triumphant, and have the world at will;' there are the powerful emotions of the soul when struggling for mastery, when intoxicated with success, when revelling in homage. If sorrow, if guilt, if despair, have made my eyes more bewitching, and my voice more thrilling; if they have roused the latent spirit within me, it shall not be in vain; I will drink deeply at these new sources of enjoyment, if not of happiness; I will cast behind me the burden borne in such anguish; I will break with the *past*, the dreadful past, and begin a new era." And, seizing the *paper which was* lying on the table, I walked quickly across the *library. As I* turned the corner of the recess which formed the

eastern end of the gallery, I saw Edward sitting by the window, where often, during the preceding summer, we had watched the sunset together. The last rays of the departing light streamed upon him, as he sat absorbed in thought; a book was on his knees; it seemed to have dropt from his hand in the depth of his abstraction; his faultless features, his chiselled mouth, the peculiar colour of his hair, and the light which shed around him a kind of halo, made him at that moment resemble the pictures of saints which Raphael and Domenichino have painted.

It seemed to me like a vision; in the highly excited state in which I then was I almost fancied it such; and the restless tide of thought within me took a new direction; the tears sprung into my eyes, and I turned away, with a softer feeling at my heart than I had known there for a long while. As I moved towards the door, the rustling of my gown disturbed Edward; he called to me to come and admire the glowing colours of the sky, where clouds over clouds of red and purple hue were floating in an atmosphere of burnished gold. I went to him, and we stood together for several minutes, till the sun descending quite beneath the horizon, left the room in comparative darkness. I then withdrew, but it was not till I reached my room that I found I had dropt the paper on which Henry's verses were written. I felt annoyed at this, and retraced my steps to the library door, but before I reached it, I met Edward, and in his hand he held the very paper I was come in search of. I did not venture to claim it from him, but he held it out to me at once, and said coldly, "Is this your property?" I felt confused, neither venturing to deny, or liking to admit the fact. In my embarrassment I muttered something about a copy of verses that Henry had written out for me, and, hastily stretching out my hand for the paper, I took it, and walked away without further explanation.

On the evening of this day we were all sitting round a table, on which work, books, and implements for writing were spread about. Henry Lovell was even more than usually animated, and spoke well and eloquently on a variety of subjects. Mrs. Middleton joined eagerly in the conversation; Edward listened attentively, *but spoke seldom.* I remember every word he said that evening.

Once Henry requested us all to say what it was we hated most, and what it was we valued most. I forget what I said, what he said, what my aunt said, but I know that to the first question, Edward answered, *duplicity;* and to the second, *truth;* and as he pronounced the word *truth*, he fixed his eyes upon me, accidentally perhaps, but so sternly that I quailed under his glance. A few minutes after, Henry read aloud from a little book that was lying before him, the following question: "Qu'est-ce que la vie? Quel est son but? Quelle est sa fin?" "I will write my answer on the margin," he cried, and wrote, "Jouir et puis mourir;" and then handed the book to me. I seized the pencil, and hastily added these words, "Souffrir, et puis mourir." Edward read them, and looked at me less sternly than before, but with an earnest inquiring expression of countenance; then lightly drawing a line with a pencil across the two preceding sentences, he wrote this one underneath them, "Bien vivre, pour bien mourir," and gave me back the book.

In general he spoke little; but there was much meaning in what he said. His reserve gave me a feeling of embarrassment with him, which, at the time I am writing of, was particularly irksome. He forced one to *think*, and I preferred dreaming alone, or drowning thought in talk with Henry. With the latter I became more intimate than ever: we read together, and it seemed to me that he always chose such books as excited my imagination to the utmost, and wrought upon my feelings, without touching on any of the subjects that would have painfully affected me. I tried to write too. From my earliest childhood I had felt great facility in composition, and it was one of Mrs. Middleton's favourite amusements to look over my various attempts, and to encourage the talent which she fancied I possessed; but now I vainly tried to exert it; my mind was not capable of a continued effort. I believe it is Madame de Staël who remarks (and how truly) that to write one must *have* suffered, and *have* struggled; one must *have* been acquainted with passion and with grief; but they must have passed away from the soul ere the mind can concentrate its powers, and bring its energies to bear on the stores which an experience in *suffering has* accumulated within us. And it was this very help-

lessness of mind, this fever in the intellect, which threw me, with such fatal dependence, on the resources which Henry Lovell's conversation and society afforded me. If he left Elmsley for a single day I felt the want of them so keenly, that I welcomed him back in a way that may have deceived others, deceived him, deceived myself perhaps — I know not — I lived but for excitement, and if the stimulus failed, I sunk for the time into momentary apathy. We sung together sometimes, and my voice seemed to have gained strength during the last few months — the old hall at Elmsley vibrated with the notes which, with the impetuosity that characterised everything I did at that time, I threw out with the full consciousness of power. Often of an evening I sat down at the organ that was placed in the gallery of the hall, and, forming various modulations on its deep melodious keys, soothed myself into a kind of dreamy unconsciousness.

One day I had gone there as usual; it was towards dusk, and I was just come home from a long ride on a cold December day. I began playing, but, gradually overcome by drowsiness, I fell asleep, my hand still on the keys of the organ, and my head resting against the edge of the high-backed chair I was sitting on. Whether it was the uneasiness of this posture, or my damp uncurled hair that was hanging on my face, or else that in sleep we discern, though it awaken us not, when something is moving near us, I know not, but my sleep was painful in the extreme. I felt as if there was a hard breathing close to me; but, turn which way I would in my dream, I could see nothing. Then I felt as if some one was laying hold of me, and I tried to scream, but could not. Then I seemed suddenly to stand on the steps of the fatal stairs, (I had often since the day of Julia's death dreamt the fearful scene over, and the impression which the dreadful reality had left on my mind was such that I had never since ventured to stand on that spot,) but now it was not of Julia that I dreamed. I was being dragged down myself to the bottom of the precipice, and the person who was forcing me along into the yawning gulf wore the form of Henry Lovell, and spoke with his voice. I called to him to stop — I entreated him with frantic violence to forbear, but just *as we were reaching the* hollow he suddenly turned round, and

there was Edward Middleton's face looking ghastly pale, and frowning upon me fearfully. I fell back, and the movement I must have made at that moment probably awoke me. I roused myself with that uneasy feeling which a terrific dream leaves on one's mind, and timidly looked about me. I was alone; there was the music-book before me, and the two candles burning as I had left them, but by the side of one of them was a coarse bit of paper, and on it was written (oh my God! how fervently I prayed at that moment that I might yet wake, and find I was still dreaming) — on it was written in large round letters "BEWARE! I KNOW YOUR SECRET!"

There have been so many dreadful moments in my life, all turning upon the one event that put the stamp upon it, that I will not vainly endeavour to describe the misery of each; but this was one of the worst. I knew not what to think — what to suspect. Was it indeed some one else, and not Edward Middleton or Henry Lovell, who had seen the share I had had in Julia's death? But no, it could not be. No servant of the house was at hand, no visitor could have been there, for it had been difficult in the extreme, at the fatal moment, to procure any help; and every person in the house had accounted for their absence in some way or other. Why, too, should they have been silent till now? And this paper, these words, there was no demand, no extortion in them — a simple intimation.

I remained frightened, bewildered, and wholly unable to rally against this new source of anxiety. I kept my bed for two days, confined there by a feverish attack. On the third the doctor pronounced me better, and able to go into the drawing-room. As I was lying there on the sofa, my aunt, who was sitting by me, nursing me as usual with the tenderest solicitude, said, "I have just received a note from Edward, which takes me quite by surprise. You know he left us on the day after the one upon which you were taken ill, to go for a week or two to London, and now he writes me word that he is going abroad for a year, and that he will not be able to return to Elmsley to take leave of us. Such a flighty *proceeding* would be very like you, Henry, but I do not understand it in Edward."

Gone, and for a year! the day after I was taken ill, too! Quick as lightning a sudden thought flashed across my mind. I drew a deep breath, but forced myself to say, "Had he told you of this plan, Henry?"

"I have had a letter from him also," was his answer; "and I thought he looked graver than usual."

Later in the afternoon, when we were left alone, he came and sat down by me, and drawing a letter from his pocket, he said, "Ellen, I wish you to read this letter, and to tell me frankly what you think of it — I own I do not understand it. He alludes to some secret, to some sorrow, it would almost seem, that he cannot disclose, and that has rendered Elmsley unpleasant to him. There is but one conjecture that I could make; but as nothing in his manner or in his way of going on corroborates it, I cannot seriously entertain it, and that is, that he is in love with you; but you will judge for yourself." Edward's letter was as follows: —

"My dear Lovell,

"A circumstance which I can neither explain nor dwell upon, and which had better remain buried in oblivion, has made a further residence at Elmsley so painful to me, that I have come to the decision of going abroad immediately, and of remaining absent for a year at least. To your sister I have written to announce my intentions, and at the same time to express my deep sense of her own and my uncle's constant kindness to me. To you I do not wish to disguise the fact, that my resolution is not founded on *caprice*, — that I have a *reason* for what I do, however unnecessary it is to state what that reason is. Our friendship makes it incumbent upon me to be so far explicit; but I beg that you will never allude, by word or by letter, to the *cause* of my absence, and that you will never question me on the subject. I have left in my room a book which I wish you to give Ellen from me. I dislike leave-takings, and shall therefore proceed to Dover from hence, without returning again to Elmsley.

"Sincerely yours,

"Edward Middleton."

It was as I had thought, then. There was the secret I had so anxiously sought to discover. He, Edward Middleton, was the possessor of mine! He had never, then, since the day of Julia's death, looked upon me, or thought of me, but as the murderer of his little cousin — as a wretch whom nothing but his forbearance could keep in the house, from which she ought to have been turned out with horror and execration. He had, however, forborne to ruin, to destroy me; and a feeling of tenderness stole over my heart at the thought. But that paper — that dreadful paper; was that his last farewell to me? Did he wish to make me feel that I was in his power? — that he held the sword of vengeance suspended over my head, and that present, or absent, I was to tremble at his name? This was unlike Edward Middleton; this was unworthy of him. He should have come to me and charged me with my crime. He should have stood before me with that stern commanding brow, and pronounced my sentence; and I would have knelt to him, and submitted to any penance, to any expiation he might have enjoined; but an unsigned, an unavowed threat, a common anonymous letter — away with it! away with it! Base, miserable device for him to resort to! My very soul sickened at the thought; and in the midst of all my other sufferings, I suffered at feeling how low he had fallen in my estimation.

I was so completely absorbed in these reflections, that I was only aroused from my abstraction by Henry's asking me, in an impatient tone, "Well, what do you gather from that letter, every word of which you seem to have learned by heart?"

"Nothing," I replied, "except that Edward is as incomprehensible as he is unsatisfactory."

He seemed tolerably satisfied with my answer, and taking away the letter, did not allude again to the subject, and only sent me by my maid the book which Edward had desired him to transmit to me. It was the "Christian Year," that wonderful, that all but inspired book. I opened it with emotion, and perhaps it might have made a powerful impression upon me, had I not found *the passages in it* which allude to guilt and to remorse carefully *marked with a pencil*, and thus, in a manner, forced on my

notice. This seemed to me the sequel of the menacing words so cruelly addressed to me, and the pride of my soul — dare I also say, the native integrity of my character — rose against such a system of secret intimidation. My heart hardened against the book, and against the giver, and I thrust it impatiently out of my sight.

Although sick at heart, grieved in spirit, and humbled to the dust at this solution of the mystery which had hung over me, yet there was some repose in the degree of security it afforded against any sudden revolution in my destiny. I was somewhat calmer, and sometimes, for a few hours together, I shook off the burden from my breast, and, in outward manner at least, resembled my former self.

CHAPTER III.

In virgin fearlessness, with step that seemed
Caught from the pressure of elastic turf
Upon the mountains, gemmed with morning dew,
In the prime morn of sweetest scents and airs;
Serious and thoughtful was her mind, and yet,
By reconcilement, exquisite and rare,
The form, port, motions, of this cottage girl,
Were such as might have quickened or inspired
A Titian's hand, addressed to picture forth
Oread or Dryad, glancing through the shade,
What time the hunter's earliest horn is heard
Startling the golden hills.

"Excursion" — Wordsworth.

On one of those mild days, which occur now and then during the winter, and which bear with them a peculiar charm, Mrs. Middleton and I had strolled out together, after breakfast, into her own flower-garden. She was making a winter nosegay of the few hardy flowers that had outlived the frost, and that seemed reviving in the strange softness of this January day.

"What a morning for a ride! my own Ellen," said my aunt, as we leant on the stone wall, which felt quite warm with the rays of the wintry sun. "What do you say to ordering the horses, taking *a long gallop*, and coming home with me with a bloom on *your dear cheeks, which* look too often like that flower, and too

seldom like this one;" and she showed me, with a smile, a white camellia, and a China rose, which she had just gathered in the green-house.

"I will do as you wish, dear aunt — please myself, and have the merit of obedience into the bargain; and I shall take these flowers too, to put in my hair this evening. But where shall I ride?"

"If you have no choice, my darling, I will give you an errand. You know Bridman Manor?"

"O yes! the ruins of the old hall, which my maid used to call the 'ghost-house,' — the old-fashioned gardens, with their broken statues and evergreen alleys, that always put me in mind of your favourite lines, by Mary Howitt —

'O, those old abbey gardens, with their devices rich;
Their fountains and green solemn walks, and saints in many a niche.'

I shall like of all things to go there to-day; but what is your errand?"

"Why, I do not know if I ever told you that your uncle had been so kind as to give up to me that pretty cottage of his, that stands on the east side of Bridman-terrace wall, for old Mrs. Tracy, who was my nurse, and afterwards Henry's. You have seen her, have you not, Ellen?"

"No," I answered; "but I have often heard you mention her."

"She was a person of some importance in our family at one time. You know that my mother died in childbirth, and that Henry's life as an infant was only saved by this woman's unwearied devotion. She was passionately attached to Henry, and her singular disposition and turn of mind gave her a hold upon him which he did not entirely shake off even when he was taken from under her care. I believe her temper was violent; but as a child he never suffered from it, and quite idolised her. She had a great deal of natural cleverness, and her manners and language were always different from those of persons in her rank of life. *I shall be curious* to hear what you think of her."

"*What made* you think of establishing her at Bridman?"

"Her son and his wife, who had gone out to India three years ago, and left their children in her care, had both died of a fever at Madras. She felt anxious to remove from the neighbourhood of London, and to settle in this part of the country. She came to me last summer, and asked my advice on the subject. I felt much interested about her, for it was an only son she had lost, and his children are, with the exception of Henry, the only objects of interest she has in the world. Her voice trembled with emotion whenever she mentioned them; and though she is tolerably well off as to money, I believe, I felt glad to afford her, in her affliction, a quiet and pleasant home. Your uncle agreed to her living in Bridman Cottage, and I hear she settled there a short time ago. I should like to send her a kind message, and to hear how she is going on."

"I shall be delighted to be your messenger, and will instantly prepare for the ride. As you are going back to the breakfast-room, pray tell Henry to be in readiness."

At twelve o'clock the horses came round; we mounted, and set off at a brisk gallop across the Park. As I turned into the lane that led in the direction of Bridman Manor, Henry asked me where I meant to go.

"To pay a visit."

"To whom?"

"To an acquaintance of yours."

"Who can you mean?"

"A very old acquaintance of yours."

"My dear Ellen, you are taking quite a wrong road: this lane leads to no house and to no cottage that we are acquainted with."

"I beg your pardon; it leads to Bridman Manor, and I am going there."

"Who do you know there?"

"Nobody; but I am going to make acquaintance with your old nurse, Mrs. Tracy."

He muttered something which sounded to me like an oath, and as I turned and looked at him, I was astonished at the singular expression *of his countenance.* He smiled, however, and said:

"*You will be making* acquaintance in that case with one of the

most insupportable women that ever lived. I strongly recommend you to keep out of her way. She wears my life out with her querulous temper and tiresome complaints; and as I do not want to go through a scene with her, you would greatly oblige me, Ellen, by giving up this project."

"I am going there with a message from Mrs. Middleton; but you need not appear. Hide yourself in the manor woods, if you dare not face your nurse, and I will join you there on my way home."

Henry looked both vexed and provoked, but made no answer. He soon rallied, however, and began again talking and laughing in his usual manner. As we were slowly mounting a hill, his horse suddenly stumbled; he jumped off, and, calling to me to stop, he examined his foot; and finding, or pretending to find, a stone in it, he set about vainly endeavouring to knock it out.

"I cannot go on any further, Ellen: all *I* shall be able to manage will be to get home without laming this horse; so pray turn back now; — you can take this message some other day."

"Sit down on that bank, 'that mossy bank where the violets grow,' my dear Henry, and muse there in sober sadness, while I face the dragon in her den." And saying these words, I galloped off without further discussion. I had not gone far before he overtook me; and quoting the words of Andrew Fairservice in "Rob Roy," which we had been reading lately, he cried out:

"'Well, a wilful man maun have his way: he who will to Curragh, must to Curragh!'" and we proceeded on our road.

On passing the gates of Bridman Manor, we skirted the edge of the woods till we came to a terrace, where the ground was laid out in quaint patterns; and vases, some broken, some in tolerable preservation, were still ranged with some sort of symmetry. By the side of what had once been a fountain sat a group which attracted my attention by the picturesque effect which it afforded. On the back of one of those nondescript semihuman monsters, whose yawning mouths once formed the spouts of the fountain, sat a girl whose features struck me as perfectly faultless, and delicate *almost beyond* what one could have fancied possible in a living *creature of real* flesh and blood. She resembled the ideal of a

sculptor; her little hand was laid on the moss-stained marble, and though not very white, its shape was so perfect that it was pleasant to gaze upon it—as it is upon any rare work of art. Near her was a little boy, apparently about three years old, who was standing on tiptoe, and thrusting his curly head into the cavity of the sphinx's mouth; another boy, who might have been ten or twelve years of age, had climbed up to the vaulted top of the fountain, and was looking down from that position at a little trickling thread of water, which still found its way into the basin below, though its passage was nearly choked by the moss and the creeping plants that intercepted its course.

As we were passing them the girl looked up, and, suddenly rising, curtseyed; and, taking hold of the little boy's hand, said, "Mr. Henry."

Henry stopped his horse, and, bowing to her in a manner that rather surprised me, in a voice that sounded to me unlike his usual one, he asked her if her grandmother was at home.

"Yes, Sir, she is," was her answer.

He turned to me and said, "That is Alice Tracy, Ellen; you can make acquaintance with her, while I speak to that boy there, who seems in a fair way to break his neck."

Dismounting hastily, he threw his horse's reins over one of the spikes of the adjoining railing, and sprang up to the spot where the boy was perched.

"Is that pretty child your brother?" I inquired of the beautiful girl who stood before me.

"He is," she answered; and lifting up the blushing boy, who was hiding himself behind her, she turned his reluctant glowing little face full towards me, in spite of his struggling efforts to thrust it into her lap, and then bent down to kiss his forehead, saying at the same time, "Naughty Johnny!"

"Will you come to me, Johnny?" was my next attempt at acquaintance.

"No, I won't," was the answer.

"*What, not to ride this* pretty black horse?"

"*Yes, I will,*" was as resolutely pronounced; and soon the

little fellow was hoisted up to my knees, and began amusing himself by vigorously pulling at my Selim's black mane.

"I am come with a message to your grandmother from Mrs. Middleton; she is anxious to know how you like Bridman."

"I dare say grandmother likes it very much; and Mrs. Middleton is very kind."

"Do you like it?"

"O yes."

"Better than the last place you lived at?"

"That was very nice, but this is better."

"What do you like better in it?"

"Many things."

At this moment I saw the boy who had been speaking with Henry dart off suddenly, and scamper away in the direction of the village. Henry at the same time joined us.

"Ah," he exclaimed, "you have contrived to tame that unmanageable little savage, who always screams when he sets eyes on me. Well, suppose you give him a ride up to the entrance of the village, and then Alice can walk home with us, and introduce you to her grandmother."

Alice made some objections to Johnny's lengthened ride, which he (Johnny) resented by pushing her most stoutly away, when she attempted to remove him from his post; and victoriously shouting over her discomfiture, he shook the bridle with exultation, and we proceeded towards the village. As we arrived in sight of Bridman Cottage, the boy who had preceded us came running back to meet us; and I heard him say in a low voice, as he came up to Henry, "Granny 's in, and I 've done your bidding."

Henry then advised me to get off my horse; and lifting down the child first, he helped me to dismount, and we walked to the cottage. It was one of those lovely little homes that we rarely see but in England, and that look (would that they always were!) like the chosen abodes of peace and happiness. The low thatched roof — the bright square-paned little windows — the porch overgrown with clematis, jessamine, and honeysuckle — the garden, where gooseberry bushes and stately hollyhocks grow side by side.

Of this description was Bridman Cottage, and one of the loveliest that I ever set eyes upon.

As we entered, an elderly female came to the door, and, making me a curtsey, said, in a formal manner, "This is an honour I had not looked to, but I know how to be thankful for it, Miss Middleton. Mr. Henry, I hope I see you well?"

"As well as usual, thank you (he replied). Miss Middleton has brought you a message from her aunt."

"Yes," I immediately said; "Mrs. Middleton is very anxious to know that you find yourself happy and comfortable here, and would have come herself to see you, if she had been able to leave my uncle for so long; but he has been ill lately, and she scarcely ever goes far from the house."

"Tell Mrs. Middleton, Ma'am, that the house is good; that the children are well; and that I am grateful to her."

There was something chilling in the manner with which this was said, and the glassy eyes and thin lips of Mrs. Tracy were far from prepossessing.

I made, however, another effort, and said, "If you could manage to get as far as Elmsley, my aunt would, I know, be glad to see you."

"I have nursed her at my bosom, and carried her in my arms, and I do not care less for her now than I did then; but if it was to save her life, I would not go to Elmsley and see —"

"Me there," exclaimed Henry. "I told you, Ellen, that I should have to go through a scene, and now, I suppose, it must come to pass. Go upstairs with Alice while I make my peace;" and as he spoke, he almost pushed me out of the room, and shut the door.

Alice followed me, and said, in her gentle voice, as I stood at the bottom of the narrow stairs, somewhat puzzled, and at a loss what to do,

"If you will come to my room, Miss Middleton, I can show you some of the reasons that make me like Bridman so much."

I gladly assented. She led the way, and opened the door of a *small room, in which* there was no furniture, but a little bed,

with dimity curtains of snowy whiteness, a deal table, and two straw chairs.

"This is a nice room," she said; "but come to the window, and you will see one of my reasons."

She threw up the sash, and pointed with her little hand to the village church, which rose in quiet beauty from among the leafless trees.

"Is it not pretty?" she asked, with a smile.

"Very pretty," I answered; and as I used her own simple words, I felt that there was that in them, said as she said them, that is often wanting in pages of impassioned eloquence, in volumes of elaborate composition, — *reality*. She was happy in this place, because of her little room, and because of the view of the village church, which she could see from its window. How pure must be the mind, how calm must be the life, when such a circumstance can give a colouring to it.

"Alice, have you no books? I see none here."

"I have a few; do you wish to see them?"

"Yes, I do; I should like to know what books you like."

"Then I must show you another of my *reasons*," she said, with one of her sweet, calm smiles, and opened the door of another very small room, which had no other entrance than through her own.

There was a little table in it, and a wooden stool; both were placed near the window. Upon the table lay two books — one was a Bible, the other a large prayer-book, bound in red morocco, and illustrated with prints. A shelf hung in one corner; "Jeremy Taylor's Holy Living and Dying," the "Pilgrim's Progress," "Bishop Heber's Hymns," and a few more books besides, were ranged upon it. Among them, a small one, which I was well acquainted with, called "Birds and Flowers," attracted my attention. I asked Alice if she had read it through.

"Yes, I have," she replied. "Mr. Henry gave it me a few months ago."

I involuntarily started, and looked up into her face, as she *said this;* but not a shade of embarrassment was to be seen there.

She went on to say — "He gave it to me because I was so fond

of this poor flower;" and she pointed to a sickly creeping plant, that grew out of a pot, which was placed on the window sill.

"You would not know it again now," she continued; "but last summer it was growing against the wall in the little patch of garden we had at Bromley, and a beautiful flower it was."

"But what had it to do with this book, more than any other flower, Alice?"

"It is a little story, but I will tell it you if you wish it. I sprained my ankle last summer, and could not walk for many weeks. Granny or brother Walter used to drive me in my chair to the open window, to breathe the fresh air, and look at the flowers in our little garden. There was nothing else to look at there — nothing but roofs of houses and black chimneys; but up the wall, and as high as my window, grew this very plant, that looks so dead now, poor thing. Day after day I watched its flowers, though I did not know their names, till I got to see in them things that I thought nobody but me had ever noticed."

"What things, Alice?"

"A cross, a crown of thorns, nails, and a hammer."

"The Passion Flower!"

"So Mr. Henry told me one day when he found me reading my new kind of book. It was like a book to me, that pretty flower; it made me think of holy things as much as a sermon ever did."

"And Henry brought you then this book, because of the poem in it on the Passion Flower?"

"He did, and read it to me out loud. It felt strange but pleasant to have one's own thoughts spoken out in such words as those."

"And you brought away your Passion Flower with you?"

"Yes, but it is dying now; and this gives me thoughts too, which I wish somebody would write about. I should like to hear them read out."

I took up her book, and drawing a pencil from my pocket, I rapidly wrote down the following lines: —

"O wish her not to live again,
Thy dying passion flower,
For better is the calm of death
Than life's uneasy hour.

Weep not if through her wither'd stem
Is creeping dull decay;
Weep not, if ere the sun has set,
Thy nursling dies away.

The blast was keen, the winter snow
Was cold upon her breast;
And though the sun is shining now,
Still let thy flower rest.

Her tale is told; her slender strength
Has left her drooping form.
She cannot raise her bruised head
To face another storm.

Then gently lay her down to die,
Thy broken passion flower;
And let her close her troubled life
With one untroubled hour."

Alice read these lines as I wrote them. When I had finished, she shook her head gently, and said, —

"These are pretty words, and pretty thoughts too; but not my thoughts."

"Tell me your own thoughts, Alice; I would fain hear them."

"I can't," she said.

"Try."

"I think as I see the flowers die so quietly, that they should teach us to die so too. I think, when I see my poor plant give up her sweet life without complaining, that it is because she has done what she ought to do, and left nothing undone which she ought to have done. I planted her in my little garden, and she grew up to my window; she gave me buds first, and then flowers — bright smiling flowers; and when I was ill she gave me holy happy thoughts about God and Christ. And therefore I wish to do likewise — to do my duty in that state of life to which it shall please God to call me; and then to die quietly, when it shall please Him, like my passion flower."

As she was finishing these words, I was startled by the loud and angry tones of Henry and of Mrs. Tracy, who seemed to be disputing violently. They were speaking both at the same time, and *his voice* was quite hoarse with anger. I overheard these

words: — "I tell you that if you do not command yourself, and behave as I desire you, I will never see you again, or put my foot into your house."

A tremendous oath followed this threat, and then their voices subsided. I looked at Alice; she seemed concerned, but not surprised or agitated, at what was going on down-stairs, and merely closed the door of her room, which had been left open. At that moment, however, Henry came half-way up the stairs, and calling to me said that it was late, and that we had better be setting out again. I complied, and in coming down into the room below I was civilly greeted by Mrs. Tracy, who thanked me for my visit, and muttered something about hoping we should soon meet again. Had it not been for Alice, who had interested and charmed me to an extraordinary degree, I should have formed exactly a contrary wish, for I had never more heartily agreed with any opinion than with that which Henry had pronounced about his former nurse; and her civility was to my mind more repulsive still than her ungraciousness. I took leave of her coldly enough, but earnestly pressing Alice's hand as I mounted my horse, I whispered in her ear, "Alice, I like your poem better than mine," and rode off.

We took a different road from that we had come by, and skirted the edge of a small lake that lies on the eastern side of the Bridman Woods. The day was altered, and dark clouds were beginning to gather over the sky; the wind was whistling among the bare branches, and Henry was unusually silent and pre-occupied. I felt depressed too, and we did not speak for some time. I was revolving in my mind what possible cause there could be for a man of Henry's character and habits entering into such a violent altercation with a person of Mrs. Tracy's age and inferior rank in life. His temper was generally good, and his manners peculiarly gentleman-like; his conduct, therefore, (however provoking she might have been,) appeared to me unaccountable. I could not help wondering also, that he should have associated on evidently intimate terms with that lovely Alice, and yet had never mentioned her to any of us, even in casual conversation. There had not been a word, however, or a look, of his or of hers, that could, for an *instant, have allowed one* to suppose that there had been anything

in their intercourse which either could have wished to hide. As to her, I could as soon have suspected of impurity the pearly drops that hung lightly on each twig of the hawthorn bushes that we passed, as her young life of one evil action, or her young mind of one evil thought. The deep blue waters of the little lake that lay stretched at our feet, were not more calm and more pure than her eyes; and in the marble paleness of her fair brow — in the divine purity of her child-like mouth — in the quiet innocence of her whole demeanour, there was that which seemed to speak of

"Maiden meditation, fancy free."

We were going at a brisk pace alongside the water, and the rapidity of our motion was an excuse for silence; but as we turned away from the lake, and began ascending a steep acclivity, which led to the moors we had yet to cross on our way home, we were forced to slacken our pace; and as we did so, I asked Henry in a half-joking manner, "Have you recovered the passion you were in just now? Your forebodings seem to have been fully realised."

"Thanks to you," he answered in a short dry manner.

"Come, come," I said, "do not visit upon me Mrs. Tracy's disagreeableness. Indeed I think you are not as patient with her as you ought to be, considering she is an old woman, and was your nurse. You were speaking to her with inconceivable violence."

"You overheard what I said to her?"

"Only a few words, and a dreadful oath."

"I was not aware that you were listening at the door. Had I imagined that you had stationed yourself there, I should certainly have been more guarded in my expressions."

I felt the colour rising into my cheeks, for the tone of his voice had something in it still more insulting than his words; but I answered carelessly, "It is a pity you did not think it worth while to controul your temper, whether you were overheard or not."

He coloured in his turn, and bit his lips; but suddenly changing the subject, he abruptly said, "How do you like *Alice?*"

"As I like all the beautiful things which God has made, and that man has not spoilt."

"She is very pretty; and she has a kind of cleverness too; but there is something tame and insipid about her, notwithstanding. In fact, I do not understand her."

"How should the serpent understand the dove?" I muttered to myself, and then my heart smote me for my unkind thoughts of Henry. I felt myself guilty of ingratitude, nay more, of hypocrisy, in thinking evil of one whose society I so much valued, and who certainly devoted himself to me with no common assiduity. I never could exactly explain to myself what my feelings were with regard to him at that time. As I said before, it would have been a severe trial to me had he left Elmsley, even for a short time.

Hour after hour I spent in conversation with him, hardly aware of the lapse of time, so great was the fascination that his powerful, original, and, withal, cultivated understanding, exercised over me; and yet, at the same time, an involuntary feeling of mistrust — an unaccountable shudder of repugnance — now and then shot over me as I listened to the sound of his voice, or as my eyes met his — and yet they were beautiful; his eyes, with their deep-gray colour that looked black by candle-light, and the fringing of their dark lashes. There was something refined in the shape of his small aquiline nose — in the form of his wide but well-formed mouth, both of which, when he was eager, bore an expression which I can only compare to that of a fiery horse when he tosses his mane, and snuffs the air of the plain which he is about to scour. Then why was it, that as I looked on his beauty, day by day, I found pleasure, if not happiness, in his devotion to me — why was it, that, now and then, the words *fearful*, *false*, and *heartless*, darted across my mind as I thought of him? and were instantaneously followed by a thrill of self-reproach, for I was *false* to him, not he to me; false in the contrast between my outward demeanour and my secret and involuntary impulses. It was I that was heartless, in feeling no real attachment for one whose life evinced an unvarying devotedness to me. False! Heartless! Was I really so? Resentment had hardened my heart against *Edward Middleton*, and every kind feeling I had ever entertained

towards him was turned to bitterness. Painful associations, and fearful remembrances, had thrown a dark shade over the pure and holy love of my childhood — the enthusiastic affection I had felt for my aunt; — and as to Henry Lovell, whose society I eagerly sought, and whose attachment I appeared to return, I was forced at times to confess to myself that there was not a grain of tenderness in the feverish predilection I entertained for him. I felt to hate myself for the deadness and coldness of my heart. I despised myself for the inconsistent impulses of my soul. Abased in my own eyes, condemned by my own judgment, I often applied to myself the words of Holy Scripture; and in bitterness of spirit exclaimed — "Unstable as water, I cannot excel. Wasted with misery; drunk, but not with wine, my heart is smitten and withered like grass. I was exalted into Heaven: I am brought down to Hell." These thoughts occupied me during the remainder of our ride.

When Henry uttered the remark which led to this train of reflections in my mind, we had reached the summit of the hill, and coming upon the wild heath that lay between us and Elmsley, we put our horses into a rapid canter, and arrived before the hall-door just as it was getting dusk.

CHAPTER IV.

"How reverend is the face of this tall pile,
Whose ancient pillars rear their marble heads
To bear aloft its arch'd and ponderous roof,
By its own weight made steadfast and immoveable —
Looking tranquillity. It strikes an awe
And terror on my aching sight; the tombs
And monumental caves of death look cold,
And shoot a chillness to my trembling heart."
"Mourning Bride." — Congreve.

During the ensuing three or four months, nothing occurred in the course of our daily life, in any way worth recording. I had spoken to my aunt of Alice Tracy in such a way as strongly to excite her interest and curiosity about her, and from this reason, *as well as from* the wish to give me pleasure, which was at all *times an all-sufficient* inducement to her, she wrote to her grand-

mother to request that if she herself did not feel inclined to come to Elmsley, she would at least allow Alice to come and spend a day with us.

Mrs. Tracy wrote a brief answer to the purport that Alice was gone away on a visit to some relations of her father, and was therefore out of reach of the honour intended her.

My uncle received now and then a letter from Edward Middleton, but never communicated its contents beyond the mere facts that he was well, and was staying in this or that town on the Continent.

Henry still remained at Elmsley; and nothing was changed in the state of things between us. The only new feature in our domestic affairs, was the growing dislike which my uncle seemed to feel towards him. He had never appeared much to like him, but now he seemed hardly able to endure his protracted residence at Elmsley, and often inquired of my aunt and myself, if Henry did not mean soon to begin the study of the law; which was the profession he was destined to pursue.

As to Henry himself, he never alluded to it, and seemed to look upon Elmsley as a permanent home. My uncle was too much attached to his wife, and by nature of too kind a disposition, to mark more plainly, than by occasional hints, his displeasure at this line of conduct; but he could hardly conceal his satisfaction, when, at last, a letter from his father obliged Henry to take the subject into consideration.

It became arranged that he should leave Elmsley in three weeks;-and I was surprised, and even mortified, at observing how little he seemed grieved or annoyed at this rather abrupt separation, and with what indifference of manner he took leave of me on the day of his departure.

A few days afterwards, there arrived a letter from Mrs. Brandon, a sister of my mother and of Mr. Middleton, containing an urgent request that I might be allowed to spend a few weeks with her in Dorsetshire.

I had only seen this aunt of mine once or twice during the *course of my childhood*; and she had left no other impression on

my mind than that she was a short, pretty-looking woman, with large dark eyes, and a peculiarly gentle voice.

I had dreaded so much the void which Henry's absence would have made in my life, that I welcomed with pleasure the idea of entering upon a new scene. I had also a vague indefinite hope that far from Elmsley — away from the material objects which recalled to me continually my fatal secret — I should, perhaps, shake off, in some degree, the sense of oppression that weighed upon me. I was only seventeen, and prematurely miserable as I was become, still there remained something in me of the spirit of youth, which pants after new scenes, new companions, and new excitements. I therefore expressed a strong wish to accept Mrs. Brandon's invitation, and this was, as usual, enough to secure Mrs. Middleton's acquiescence, and my uncle made no objection to the plan.

Accordingly, on one of the first days of the month of June, in a small open carriage, accompanied by a lady who had once been my governess, and who had undertaken to escort me to Brandon Park, I left Elmsley, in tears indeed, for as my aunt pressed me to her bosom, I returned her embrace with an intense emotion, that seemed to resume in itself the history of my past life; but still with the eager impatience of the bird who wildly takes his flight from the perch to which he is still confined, and hopes, by the keen impetuosity with which he soars, to shake off the dead weight which chains him down to earth. The day was beautiful: white fleecy clouds were flitting rapidly across the sky; and the mild breeze that fanned my cheek was scented with the perfume of the fields of clover, through which our road chiefly lay during the first stage of our journey. The sky, the air, the smells, the sounds, the rapid motion of the carriage, were all sources of the keenest enjoyment. Fortunately for me, Mrs. Hatton, my travelling companion, possessed the qualification of finding amusement in herself, and by herself, to an extraordinary degree. I have never met with so thoroughly good-humoured a person. She always liked best whatever was proposed to her to do, and never *liked at all* anything that others were not inclined to. Whatever *happened to be* ordered for dinner, was invariably the thing she

preferred; but if, by any mischance, it did not appear, and something else appeared in its stead, she as suddenly recollected that she liked the new dish a great deal better than the one that had failed. Even the weather received at her hands very different treatment from that which it is accustomed to meet with. A black frost she considered wholesome and bracing; a cutting east wind, she described as a fresh breeze; snow, rain, and hail, had each particular merits, in her eyes. When the sun shone, it was fortunate; when it rained, it was a piece of luck, for she had ever so many letters to write; and there was nothing like a rainy day for getting through business. And if the weather was without any other apology, "Still," as I heard her once say, "it was better than no weather at all."

I never heard her admit that anything was a grievance; that anybody was tiresome. Her friends' misfortunes, indeed, she felt heartily sorry for; but, with respect to them, she found consolation in the fact, that, in proportion to their extent, she could bestow a fuller share of sympathy, a more ample measure of kindness than ever, out of the ever-springing sources of tenderness, with which her own heart overflowed.

Poor Mrs. Hatton! she was the best of women, but not the wisest of governesses. During the years that she superintended my education, she had never been able to disagree with me, as to grammar and arithmetic being dull and perfectly useless studies; or help agreeing with me that Sir Walter Scott's novels improved the mind infinitely more than Goldsmith's History of England; and so I read novels to her, and she listened with delighted attention — I wrote poetry, which she read aloud, and declared was the best that had ever been written — I put aside all the books that bored me, all the exercises that puzzled me, and she heartily concurred with me, in pronouncing them all highly unprofitable and superfluous.

Dear Mrs. Hatton! she was not wise; but such guileless, warm-hearted lack of wisdom as hers, often supplied the place of those mental qualifications which are too seldom united to a perfect singleness of heart and simplicity of character.

She was, indeed, a capital travelling companion; as we passed

the gates of Elmsley I said to her, "Do you know, dear Mrs. Hatton, that I am apt to be very silent in a carriage; shall you mind it?"

"It is the very thing I like best, dear, to drive along and look about me, and not have the trouble of talking. The very thing I like best; there is nothing so tiring as to talk in a carriage." And settling herself in her corner, she gave herself up to looking about her; and she was right; for what in the world is so pleasant, as a living German authoress says, as "on a fine summer morning through a lovely country rapidly to fly, like the bird, that wants nothing of the world but its surface to skim over. This is the really enjoyable part of travelling. The inn life is wearisome; the passage through towns is fatiguing. The admiration due to the treasures of art, to the wonders of science, is a task from which one would sometimes gladly buy one's self off, at the price of a day of wood-cleaving or water-carrying. But to lean back in perfect quiet in a carriage while it rolls lightly and easily along a good road; to have a variety of pictures pass before one's eyes as in a dream, each remaining long enough to please, none long enough to tire; to allow the thoughts that spring from the magical connection of ideas to flit across the mind, in unison with the visible objects before us; to be tied down by no earthly cares—sure to find a meal wherever one stops; and should one happen not to find a bed, to have nothing worse in store than to sleep *à la belle étoile*, rocked by the carriage as in a cradle; ever to hear the rolling of the wheels, which, like the murmur of a brook, the clapping of a mill, or the splash of oars in the water, forms, by its uniformity, a soothing accompaniment to the everlasting fluctuation of thought in the mind. This is a bliss which, like that of love and lovers, genuine travellers alone believe in; and, except genuine lovers, there is nothing more seldom met with in the world than genuine travellers. For those who travel from curiosity, from *ennui*, for health, or for fashion, or in order to write books, belong not to them, and know nothing of that intoxicating repose."*

Such was the enjoyment in which I hoped Mrs. Hatton found ample compensation for my silence. She was no doubt a genuine traveller; for she must have been genuine in every character she

* "*Aus* der Gesellschaft," by the Countess Hahn-Hahn.

assumed; though I fear that her notion of the happiness of not talking, and of looking about her, would have fallen short of the German countess's ideal of a traveller's bliss.

After a journey of about eighty miles, at five o'clock in the evening we reached the town of Salisbury, where we were to sleep that night. We ordered dinner at the inn, and I then walked to the cathedral. I had never seen one before; and when I came in sight of its tower, and then of the whole of its beautiful structure, tears rushed into my eyes, and I stood entranced in contemplation before it. My hands involuntarily clasped themselves as in prayer, and I longed to fall on my knees and adore there the God who had given to man's heart to desire, to his mind to conceive, and to his hand the power of raising, such shrines for His worship.

Salisbury Cathedral stands in the middle of a close, where evergreens and shrubs of all kinds rise from the smooth green grass that grows quite up to the foot of its walls. The door was closed; but while I sent to procure the key from the sexton, I walked slowly round the exterior of the cathedral, and paused for some minutes in a spot where, in a recess formed by the angles of the building, I stood with nothing round me but the beautiful gothic walls — nothing above me but the blue sky. It seemed a spot fitted for holy meditation, for heavenly aspiration; it was a spot that might have been selected when the Saviour's visible presence was withdrawn, by that Mary who chose the good part which was never to be taken from her. It might have been the resort of that Hannah who departed not from the Temple but served the Lord with fastings and with prayers day and night. It might have been the chosen retreat of one who, amidst all the blessings of life, day by day made preparation for the hour of death. The vision of such a life, of a course of sacred duties, of holy affections, of usefulness in life, of resignation in death, of humility in time of weal, of peace in time of woe; such a vision passed before my eyes even then, and my lips murmured: "Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my latter end be like his."

The sexton arrived with the key; and entering by the great portal door, I wandered for nearly an hour through the aisles, and *lingered in the choir and in* the chapel, though there was scarcely

light to do more than just to trace the outlines of the masses of columns which rise in severe simplicity, and arch above one's head at a height which, in the dimness of the twilight, was scarcely discernible. After having visited the cloisters, and been so beguiled by their beauty as to forget that dinner was to be on the table at six o'clock, and that it was now verging on the half-hour past, I hurried back to the inn just as the first set of mutton-chops were coming up the stairs, and had just time to close Mrs. Hatton's mouth with a kiss as she was beginning to assure me, in answer to my apologies, that there was nothing in the world she liked so much as waiting for dinner.

The weather had grown close and warm; and we were glad, immediately after we had finished eating, to have the table cleared, and to draw our chairs to the open bow-window. It commanded a view all down the street, which at that moment bore the peculiarly dull and dusty appearance which streets in provincial towns are apt to present on a summer's evening. Two or three children were playing at marbles before one door, and screaming at each other in that particular key which games of this description call into exercise. Now and then a small cart drove by, and a few people on foot occasionally walked past the window. The clouds were gathering rapidly over the sky, and the air was becoming every instant more sultry and oppressive. Heavy drops of rain began to fall one by one in large round spots on the dusty pavement. Red and dark-green umbrellas began to be unfolded; the carts to drive by more briskly; the marble players to withdraw into the house after sundry vociferations from some neighbouring window; and the whole scene fairly assumed the hopeless character of a rainy summer's evening. Meantime two men had stationed themselves under the projecting roof of our inn at the outset of the shower, and kept up between themselves a conversation, of which a few words occasionally reached my ears. One of the speakers was a man seemingly of fifty or thereabouts, of a heavy, dull character of countenance; his dress that of a tradesman, not of the better sort. The other was a young man who would have been handsome had it not been for a scowl which disfigured his otherwise well-shaped features. *The oldest* of the two men said to the other, apparently in

answer to some inquiry, "Not till the old un dies, which he will soon."

"Is he as bad as that comes to?" returned the other. A cart rumbled by at that moment, and I heard nothing more, and would have probably left the window had not the next words that were spoken arrested my attention.

"So Alice is here?" observed the youngest of the two speakers.

"And are you still after that ere spec?" was the answer.

I immediately identified the Alice they were speaking of with Alice Tracy, and I could not help listening on with the wish to hear something that would corroborate or destroy this idea.

"She 'll never have you, take my word for it," continued the same man.

"May be not, while the gemman 's a-courting her; but he 's after other game, I take it, now."

"I seed him here, with my own eyes, not four days ago," said the first speaker. — "Old mother Tracy has him in her clutches, I 'll warrant you. She didn't come down with the shiners for nothing."

"He 's a limb of Satan; and if he were the devil himself, I 'd tear his eyes out first," retorted the younger man with a fearful volley of oaths.

"And he 'd snap his fingers at you, and give you into a policeman's charge. That 's no go, my hearty —"

"But if the old un is dying; as you say, and the lass comes in for the cash, he 'll not be such a d—d fool —"

"Ay, ay; but mother Tracy, with the bit of paper you know of, would prove an awkward customer for that ere chap! But I 'll tell ye, my lad, — you 've but one chance —"

Here the speaker's voice sunk into a whisper, and I did not catch another word. The two men soon took a reconnoitring glance at the weather; and after looking up the street and down the street, and up at the sky, where nothing was visible but a thick mass of gray clouds, they seemed to awake to the thorough hopelessness of the case, and walked off, muttering imprecations on the weather.

I remained by the window absorbed in thought, till Mrs. Hal-

ton apprised me that tea was come. There was, indeed, matter for thought in the few words these men had uttered; and the thoughts they suggested were perplexing in the extreme. It was of Alice Tracy they had spoken, for I had twice distinctly heard her grandmother's name pronounced. She was in Salisbury at this very moment, it appeared; these two rough and somewhat discreditable men were acquainted with her. A gentleman (to use their own expression) was after her; but the youngest man of the two had expressed a hope that he was at present devoting himself to some other person. Could this gentleman be Henry Lovell? Had he been base, vile enough to attempt the ruin of the lovely girl whose beauty and innocence had seemed to me to belong to a higher sphere than that of this world of ours? Was his devotion to me what was alluded to in the conversation I had overheard? Who was the person whose death they seemed to expect? I was lost in a maze of doubts and conjectures; among which the most distressing was the one that presented to my mind the idea of Alice becoming a victim to the infamous pursuit of Henry Lovell. But again, what could they mean by his (the gentleman, whoever he was,) being in Mrs. Tracy's clutches? I vainly racked my brain to form some conjecture which would account for the different parts of this short conversation. Poor Mrs. Hatton must have thought me apt to be silent, not only in a carriage, but out of one, too, if she judged by my taciturnity on this occasion. When the waiter came in to fetch the tea-things away, I asked him if he knew of any person living in Salisbury, and bearing the name of Tracy? He did not know of any such, he said, but would inquire if I wished. As he was going out of the room, he turned back, and holding the handle of the door with one hand, and passing the other through a bushy head of hair, he added: "I suppose it 's quality you are asking for, Ma'am?"

"No; any persons of that name: do you know any?"

"There 's an old Miss Tracy, Ma'am, lives in the next street here; she was sister to the grocer that died two years ago."

"Do you happen to know if she has had any relations staying with her lately?"

"*I think she has*, Ma'am; for she hired a bed, a chair, and

a table, some three months ago, of my brother, who lets out furniture; and she 'd not go to expense for nothing: her late brother's money is safe enough in her keeping."

As I still looked interested in the subject of Miss Tracy's expenses, the waiter, who was evidently of a communicative turn of mind, closed the door and came back to the table to wipe off some nearly imperceptible crumbs that were lying on the smooth, bright mahogany.

"It was a curious thing enough, Ma'am," he resumed; "nobody in the wide world knowing that the grocer in — street, — old Tracy, as he was called, — had scraped together thirty thousand pounds, and never had been the better for it while he lived."

"Nor when he died," I thought to myself; and inquired if the whole of that sum had been left to the lady who certainly would not go to expense for nothing?

"No, only half, Ma'am," was the answer; "fifteen thousand pounds in hard cash her brother left her; but it is not many folk in Salisbury that have seen the colour of her money. She 'll keep adding on to it as long as she lives."

"And where did the other fifteen thousand pounds go?" I asked.

"They was lodged in some Lunnon banker's hands, Ma'am, I fancy. It 's said he left that other half of his money to some relations that lived thereabouts, but I can't tell for sure."

I longed to ask him, if he knew what kind of people had been staying with Miss Tracy, and to find out, if possible, if it was Alice, and whether she was still in Salisbury; but I felt ashamed of questioning on, and, during the pause that ensued, my informant gave one more general polishing to the table, pushed one or two chairs out of their places, poked the fire, which did not want poking, and with a side bow left the room. My curiosity was so strongly excited, that I could not refrain from asking Mrs. Hatton if she knew anything of the Mrs. Tracy, who, in old times, had been my aunt's maid, but she had never seen her, and could give me no information on the subject. We were to start the next morning at nine o'clock, and I resolved to make an effort to satisfy *myself as to the state* of the case by calling at Miss Tracy's door

before setting off. At eight o'clock accordingly, having ascertained from my friend, the waiter, the name of the street and the number of the house, I set out, and as I approached it, my heart beat with a strange mixture of shyness, anxiety, and curiosity. I pulled the bell, and was almost tempted to run away when I heard some one walking heavily to the door to open it. It opened however before I had made up my mind to bolt, and I asked the slip-shod, red-faced girl who appeared, whether Miss Tracy lived there?

"Yes, she does (was the answer). What 's your will, Miss?"

"Is Miss Alice Tracy staying with her?"

"Yes, she is."

"Is she at home?"

"No, she aint, she 's in church, but her grandmother 's at home."

I did not feel courage enough to renew my acquaintanee with Mrs. Tracy, whose reception of me at Bridman Cottage I well remembered, and whose forbidding countenance had remained strongly impressed on my recollection. I therefore drew a bit of paper from my pocket, and hastily writing my name upon it, I was just handing it to the girl, when it struck me that it was possible, that, after all, there might be two Alice Tracys in the world, and that I had better not leave my name at a venture. I therefore tore off the bit of writing, and on the remaining slip of paper I drew a passion flower, and requested the girl to give it to Miss Alice Tracy when she came home.

"But what 's your name, Ma'am?" she inquired.

"Never mind it," I replied. "Miss Alice will know it immediately, if she is my Miss Alice, and if she is not, it does not signify," and I walked off, leaving the puzzled portress with her mouth wide open, my sketch in her hand, and her intellect evidently employed in balancing the probabilities as to the sanity of mine.

The britschka was at the door when I got back to the inn, and Mrs. Hatton with her veil down, and her boa round her neck, was waiting for me in the little sitting-room. We hastened into the carriage and rattled off through the streets of Salisbury, and were soon after ascending at a slow pace the hill that lies on the west

side of the town. After a few hours of uninteresting driving along the high road, we turned into a lane which brought us at once into a new kind of scenery, quite different from any that I had yet been acquainted with. On either side of us rose, in gentle acclivities, a boundless extent of down, diversified by large patches of gorse, tall clumps of broom shining in all the gorgeous beauty of their yellow flowers, and spreading beds of fern, that loveliest of leaves, as beautiful in its form, and almost as architectural in its natural symmetry, as the more classical acanthus.

As we advanced into the very heart of the country, the character of the scenery changed, and became of a more woodland description. Hedges on both sides of the road bounded our view, but there was ample compensation for this in these delicious hedges themselves, in which hawthorn stood out in sturdy independence from among the intricacies of shrubs and brambles, that imprisoned their stems, while they scattered their snowy blossoms on the shining leaves and green patches of grass beneath them; in which the frail but daring eglantine twined its weak tendrils round the withered trunk of some hollow, worn-out oak; in which the wild clematis and the feathery traveller's-joy, as children love to call it, flung their fairy flowers in reckless profusion over the tangled mass from whence they sprung. There was enough in these hedges to make up for the loss of views; but we had views too, when, for a moment, a gate, a stile, a gap in the hedge itself, opened to us glimpses of such woods and dells as we read of in the Midsummer Night's Dream.

We reached Brandon at four o'clock. It stands in the midst of what was formerly a chase of immense extent, and which now forms a park of extraordinary size, and of singular beauty. The hand of man seems to have done but little to improve that beauty: the house stands as if by chance in the midst of a wilderness of downy hills and grassy valleys, of hawthorn groves, and wild commons, of remnants of forests, and miles of underwood. I was so engrossed by the strange character of this, to me, perfectly novel scenery, that I thought little of anything else as we drove up to the house: and when on reaching the entrance door, *the servants rushed to* let down the step, and seize upon the

luggage, I felt taken by surprise; rousing myself, I took an affectionate leave of Mrs. Hatton, who was proceeding to her own home in the town of —, about ten miles beyond Brandon, and we did not part without my promising her, that, if I could possibly contrive it, I would visit her there before I left Dorsetshire.

CHAPTER V.

But ever and anon of griefs subdued,
There comes a token like a scorpion's sting,
Scarce seen, but with fresh bitterness imbued;
And slight withal may be the things which bring
Back on the heart the weight which it would fling
Aside for ever. LORD BYRON.

ON inquiry, I found that my aunt was out, and as I was not acquainted with a single person staying in the house, I begged to be shown at once to my room, instead of going into the library, where I was told some of the company were to be found. The housekeeper led the way up-stairs, and having established me in a large and very comfortable room, left me to myself. I sat down in an arm-chair, and except the occupation, if it can be so called, of watching my maid, while she unpacked the different parts of my evening dress, I spent the next hour in complete idleness.

At the end of that time, the rolling of wheels and the clatter of horses' feet drew me to the window. I was pleased to have an opportunity of inspecting some part of the society which I was so soon to be introduced to. First, there stopped at the hall door a pony-chaise, from which Mrs. Brandon and another woman got out; behind them sat an elderly man, tall and dark, not Mr. Brandon, though (as far as I recollected) like him: behind them came galloping up to the steps a riding party, two women and three or four men; among them was Henry Lovell, who was certainly about the last person I should have expected to meet. He looked in high spirits, and I heard him calling out to somebody in the house, "Is she come?" and two or three minutes afterwards, Mrs. Brandon and he came into my room together.

She kissed me most affectionately, and keeping both my hands *in hers, and diminishing* at the same time her beautiful eyes into

the sharpest, but most *caressante* expression (I know no English word which expresses the look I mean), she fixed them on mine and said, "I am so much obliged to you, Henry, and to you for coming, dearest Ellen; but I ought to thank him first, for he taught me to wish to know you, and to love you. It is not a hard lesson," — she added, in the sweetest tone of voice imaginable. I tried to smile and look pleased, but I was out of sorts, though I could hardly tell exactly why. If I had heard at Elmsley that I was to have met Henry at Brandon, I should have probably been glad, but somehow my short journey had put me into a different state of mind. I had been more free from painful thoughts, immediately connected with myself at least, than at any time for a good while past; I had felt an unconscious relief in seeing new faces, and hearing new voices; I longed to feel unwatched, unnoticed. Then the conversation I had heard between the two men at Salisbury had left a disagreeable impression upon my mind, although too vague to influence my judgment. Then again, why, if Mrs. Brandon's wish to see me, and her consequent invitation, were the result of his praises, had he not talked to me of her? Why had he not said he should meet me at her house? Obliged, alas! as I was myself by my miserable fate, to practise constant dissimulation, I still hated it strangely in others, and I felt aware that I answered Mrs. Brandon ungraciously, and greeted Henry coldly. As usual, he was perfectly self-possessed, but soon withdrew, leaving me alone with Mrs. Brandon.

"Do let us sit down here together, dearest Ellen," said she, drawing me to a couch as she spoke; "I do so long to be well acquainted with you, and I feel to know so well all about you, we shall be great friends soon, I am sure." And she again squeezed my hands, and looked into my eyes with that pretty but over-confidential look in hers.

We talked about my uncle and aunt, on which she said, "Was not dear Mrs. Middleton a little angry with me for seducing you away from Elmsley? But I fancy she is in the secret; is not she?"

"She was much pleased at your kindness in wishing to see me," I answered; quite puzzled as to what the secret she alluded *to could be.*

"And now, dear Ellen," she continued, "you must treat me quite like a sister, like a friend, not as an old aunt, or I shall be affronted, and very jealous of Mrs. Middleton. You must speak to me quite openly."

"You are so very kind," I said, while all the time I thought, "What on earth are you at?" The idea of her being jealous of my affection for Mrs. Middleton struck me as perfectly ridiculous, and the very fact of being requested to speak openly, effectually inclined me to shut myself up, in an additional amount of reserve. I tried, however, to be amiable and warm; and after a little more conversation, Mrs. Brandon left me, to go and dress for dinner.

A few minutes after the bell had rung, I went down to the library, and found nearly everybody assembled. I went through a number of introductions. The women that I made acquaintance with were Lady Wyndham, Mrs. Ernsley, Miss Moore, and two Miss Farnleys. The men were standing together in the middle of the room, but except Mr. Brandon (who immediately came to me and made a number of civil speeches), none of them approached us before dinner was announced. Sir Charles Wyndham then took me in.

Just as we were sitting down, Mrs. Brandon called to Mr. Ernsley, who was preparing to place himself in the chair on the other side of me; "Dear Mr. Ernsley, won't you come and sit by me? I do so long to hear what you think of Meldon Hall, which I am told you went to see to-day." And as he obeyed her directions, Henry Lovell slipped into the chair by my side, which accounted to me for the look of intelligence which Mrs. Brandon directed to our part of the table, to which he perhaps responded, but to which I certainly did not. I was not sorry, however, to have an opportunity of speaking to him, as I felt curious to know how he would account for his sudden change of plans, and I wished also to find out if he had been at Salisbury during the last few days.

He immediately said to me, "Are you surprised at seeing me here?"

"As much," I replied, "as to find that it is to you I am indebted for being invited here at all."

"*And if it was so*, would it affront you?"

"It would not be particularly flattering."

"You would think it more flattering, would you, that a woman, who has only seen you once, and that seven years ago, should wish to see you again, than that I (and here he spoke in the lowest possible whisper), after such days, such months, as I spent at Elmsley, should have strained every nerve not to lose sight of you."

"Then this has been a scheme of your forming? I hate scheming."

"I was in London; I detested it, and I came here; but I wish to God I had not! (he added, with more of passion than of tenderness in his voice;) for my coming is evidently disagreeable to you, and I cannot brook the coldness of your manner (he continued, in a still increasing tone of agitation). It puts me beside myself, Ellen, and makes a fool of me, which is of all things what I most dislike to be made."

"What is it you most dislike to be made, Mr. Lovell?" inquired Sir Charles Wyndham, who had been restless and fidgetty, till he could catch at something in our conversation, which would enable him to join in it.

"A fool, Sir Charles," answered Henry, with an expression of countenance, which certainly did not bear in it any consciousness of his own folly.

"The ladies make fools of us all," said Sir Charles, with a bow to me.

"Unless they find us ready made," I heard Henry mutter, while I was obliged to turn round and listen to a string of compliments, and a flow of small talk from my right hand neighbour, which it seemed as if nothing would stop but some lucky accident, some sudden overthrow of the regular course of things, so steady and even was the tenor of its gentle prolixity. He had an eye, the mildness of which was appalling, and a smile of despairing sweetness. As I looked at him, I wished (which had never happened to me to wish before in looking at anybody's face) that he had been very ugly; no ugly face could have been so hopelessly tiresome. If but for a moment he could have looked cross or ill-natured, it *would have been the making* of him, or rather of me, for then I

should have had courage to cut his discourse short, and turn away; but as it was, dinner was nearly over before I had another opportunity of speaking to Henry, who at last brought about the *event* I had pined for, by overturning a pyramid of red and white cherries, which went rolling all over the table in different directions, and for a moment engrossed Sir Charles's benevolent exertions. Henry immediately seized on the favourable moment, and resumed our conversation, though in an altered tone.

"The fact is, dear Ellen, that, on my arrival in London, I found my solicitor out of town, and my father gone on a visit to some friends of his in Hertfordshire. I have a general invitation to this place; and it struck me (I was wrong perhaps) that it might be, as well as a gratification to myself, a comfort to you, among a set of strangers, to find a friend; and I suppose I may call myself one."

He said all this in such a gentle, earnest manner, and in fact the thought had been such a kind one, that I felt quite ashamed of myself; and in the reaction of the moment, I turned to him with some emotion and said,

"You are very kind to me, Henry, and it grieves me to think that I must have appeared to you ungracious—ungrateful even."

"Only a little capricious," he answered; "and should I prize as much that bright smile of yours, Ellen, if the transient cloud had not made its brightness still dearer?"

At this moment Mrs. Brandon gave the signal for withdrawal. Henry whispered to me, as I was looking for my gloves under the table,

"Now that I have explained my being here, at the expense of a fearful havoc among Mr. Brandon's cherries, I shall be at leisure, when we come to the drawing-room, to give you my opinion of the society here; pray do not make up your mind about anybody till I come."

I left the dining-room in better humour than when I went in, and sat down with the two Miss Farnleys, at a round table covered with annuals and albums. We entered into conversation, and *got on* (as the phrase is) very well. They were both nice-looking *girls; the eldest* was handsome. It was not difficult to comply with

Henry's request, that I should not make up my mind about any one till he had given me his opinion; for a whole quarter of an hour had not elapsed before he made his appearance in the drawing-room, and instantly came and sat down on the couch by me. Lady Wyndham at that moment begged the eldest Miss Farnley to come and give her advice about some pattern or stitch that she was employed upon, and the youngest went to the open window to speak to Mrs. Brandon and to Mrs. Ernsley, who were walking up and down the gravel walk near the house.

"How do you like your aunt, Ellen?"

"Don't call her my aunt; that is a name sacred to me. I cannot call any one but your sister, my aunt."

"Well, Mrs. Brandon, then; how do you like her?"

"I thought I was not to make up my mind about any one without your assistance?"

"True, but I did not include her; she is an old friend of mine, and I might be partial."

"There would be no harm in biassing me in her favour. I ought to like her, and I 'm afraid I don't."

"Don't you?" said Henry, in a tone of so much annoyance and mortification, that I looked at him with surprise. "You will like her," he added, "when you know her."

"But when did you see so much of her? And if she is such a friend of yours, why did you never talk to me of her?"

He did not answer immediately, and I went on.

"But you are very mysterious about all your acquaintances; for instance, you know how delighted I was with Alice Tracy."

I was obliged to summon up all my courage to pronounce her name; how often does one feel that there are subjects which become forbidden ones between people with whom in general there exists no reserve, and which, by some strange instinct, one cannot touch upon without emotion, though nothing reasonable can be alleged to account for it. He started, and his countenance instantaneously clouded over; but I went on with a kind of cowardly courage.

"*And yet, I dare say,* you have seen her, or heard something

about her since our visit to Bridman Manor, and have never told me."

"I have *not* seen her."

"Where is she now?" I persisted, feeling that if I let the subject drop, it would require a fresh effort to resume it again.

"I don't know."

"Is she likely to be staying at Salisbury?"

"At Salisbury?"

"Yes, there are some people of that name living there. I called at the house early this morning, and asked for Alice. She was out, but if I knew that she was staying on there, nothing would be easier than to go and pay her a visit one morning from hence, and I should like it of all things."

"Ellen," said Henry, "you cannot go on seeing Alice, or have anything to do with any of that family. You are quite a child, and childishly headstrong I well know, but I really must insist upon this."

"I do not exactly see the right that you have to insist upon my doing or my not doing anything; but, at least, give me some good reason for this dictation."

"They are people with whom you cannot with propriety associate; at your age you can be no judge of such things."

"It was my aunt who sent me to them, in the first instance; consequently, she can know nothing against Mrs. Tracy; and, as to Alice, you cannot mean that *she* — unless —"

I stopped short; my heart was beating violently. I felt that modesty, propriety, dignity, forbade my hinting at my suspicions; but they were rushing again on my mind with fresh force; and as I looked at Henry, I felt that my cheeks were burning, and my eyes flashing.

"No," he said, as if he had not remarked my agitation, or else that it had calmed his. "No; Alice's character is perfectly good; but, in visiting her, you would be liable to fall in with persons whom it would be in every way unpleasant to be thrown amongst."

I remembered the two men at Salisbury, and felt this might be *true; there was* something so plain, and indifferent, too, in his

manner of doing justice to Alice, that it removed my suspicions; and when he said —

"Well, now, for Heaven's, sake let us leave off talking on a subject on which it seems we are always destined to quarrel."

I smiled, and made no effort to pursue it farther, but listened to his account of the society at Brandon.

"Lady Wyndham (he said) is as you can see in looks, the very reverse of her husband — quite guiltless of his insipid comeliness. I have never found out anything beyond that; for she is as stern and as silent as he is communicative, perhaps on the system of compensation, and from a strict sense of justice to society."

"And the Miss Farnleys (I said), we have just made acquaintance; but I am quite disposed to like or dislike them, according to the report you make of them."

"The Miss Farnleys (he replied) have been brought up almost entirely abroad, and are, perhaps, not spoilt, but certainly fashioned by this circumstance. The oldest is not the least affected in manner, nor indeed in conversation, except that one is willing to attribute to affectation the very silly things which an otherwise intelligent person is in the habit of saying."

"What kind of things?"

"Why, for instance, she will tell you that she cannot exist without flowers, and therefore keeps loads of them in her room at night, though they give her a raging headache. But don't think her silly (though it is difficult to help it, I own), for this very girl, when she broke her arm last year, submitted to the most painful operation without a groan, in order that her father, who was ill at the time, should not be agitated or alarmed, though, when he left the room, she fainted from the intensity of agony. Do not think her wicked, if she tells you that she pines to be overturned in a carriage, or to be wrecked at sea; if she boasts that she throws out of window the medicines that are prescribed for her, or that she swallows poison, to try how she feels after it; for she risked her life a few months ago to save a drowning child; and when the village near their country place was on fire, she went about among *the distracted people* like an angel of mercy. Do not, therefore,

think her silly, wicked, or mad, whatever she may say to you, but only wonder where she learnt that to seem so was a charm."

"And her sister, that girl with a Grecian profile and straight eyebrows?"

"That girl, who sometimes is hardly pretty, and at other times perfectly beautiful, is very clever, though she too says silly things now and then, but quite in a different line. She is original and agreeable, though she lisps and drawls, till the spirit within her is roused. She is very provoking if you dislike her; still more so, perhaps, if you like her. In short, I hardly know which to recommend you to do; only, I am sure if you do like her, you will like her very much, and will better spare a better woman — Lady Wyndham, for instance."

"And that little Miss Moore, who is sitting over her book with a look of such intense enjoyment in her large eyes, what account do you give of her?"

"Oh, everybody doats upon the little Irish girl; nobody can tell exactly why. It is, I suppose, because her eyes speak to you whether her tongue does or not. It is because she unites the most contrary extremes, and leaves you to puzzle over them; because she sails into the room, with her little stately manner, and salutes you with a formal curtsey; and then, under all this air of dignity, you discover the very merriest-hearted little romp that ever existed. You *must* be fond of her. As refined in mind and in manner as the most fastidious could require, she has, at the same time, the humour, the native fun of her country — it sparkles in her eyes — it bubbles in her laugh. She is a little patriot, too: when Ireland is mentioned, you will see her cheek flush, and her spirit rise. It is the only strong feeling she seems to have; for, otherwise, like the jolly miller of Dee, she cares for nobody, and if others care for her, she does not appear to thank them for it. I have often heard men say, how in love they would be with Rosa Moore, if it were not for this thankless, hopeless, remorseless indifference. Now, I think this is a mistake; for I believe her great charm really lies in that very recklessness of what others think of her, or feel for *her, in the eager*, child-like impetuosity with which she seeks

amusement, and in the perfect self-possession with which she treats everything and everybody."

"And Mrs. Ernsley, Henry; what do you say of her?"

"Mrs. Ernsley? It is much more difficult to say what she is, than what she is not; so allow me to describe her in negatives. She is *not* handsome, for her features are bad, and her complexion is sallow. She is not plain, for she has pretty eyes, pretty hair, a pretty smile, and a pretty figure. She is not natural, for her part in society is pre-arranged and continually studied. She is not affected, for nobody talks to you with more earnestness, or more of natural impulse and spontaneousness; but still, she is always listening to herself. She is the person who is attracting, who is charming you, natural to a fault, unguarded to excess (she says to herself). Then, she is not a bad sort of woman; she has a great regard for her husband, and takes great pains with her little girls; but she is always playing with edged tools; she is always lingering on the line of demarcation. She is eternally discussing who are in love with her — though she is such a very good sort of a woman — and who would be in love with her if she was not? Above all, she is by no means partial to other women, whether they have stepped over the line, or kept within it. She will hate you, Ellen, depend upon it, with an innocent kind of hatred: she will do you no harm, for she is kind-hearted in reality; only it will be nuts to her if anybody says that Miss Middleton is not near so pretty as they had expected; and she will try to put you down whenever you open your mouth; but don't be put down, and then you will remain mistress of the field, for she will grow so fidgetty, (not cross, for she is, in fact, good-tempered,) that she will lose her self-possession, and then all will be over with her."

"I have not the slightest wish to enter the lists with her. But now, tell me something of the men who are here."

"That will be quickly done; — Sir Charles is a fool; Mr. Ernsley is a prig; and Mr. Farnley has a broad kind of humour, and a talent for mimicry, but he is coarse and unrefined, which, by the way, is, perhaps, the reason that his daughter thinks it *necessary to be so painfully* the reverse. Mr. Brandon, your

aunt's brother-in-law, is an agreeable man. Mr. Manby is a lout."

"And Sir Edmund Ardern?" I inquired.

"Oh, as to Sir Edmund Ardern, I entreat you, on the same principle on which pastry-cooks cram their apprentices during the first few days, to talk to him incessantly. Let him sit by you to-morrow at breakfast, at luncheon, at dinner, walk with him, and ride with him; I shall not come near you, in order that he may have full scope for his fascinating powers; you shall be fascinated till you cry for mercy."

I laughed, but secretly thought that something of the severity of his satire proceeded from the fact, that Sir Edmund was the only handsome and pleasing person in the house, and I did not feel inclined to take entirely for granted, that Henry's judgment of him was correct.

Our *tête-à-tête* was soon interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Ernsley, and the arrival of tea. Mrs. Ernsley threw herself into a large arm-chair, flung her bonnet and shawl on the opposite couch, and then began arranging her hair.

"You look tired, Mrs. Ernsley," said Henry.

"To death," she answered. "Dear Mrs. Brandon has been wondering whether the stars are inhabited or not. It is not fair to make one stretch out one's mind so far."

"What did Sir Edmund pronounce on the subject?" inquired Henry.

"That there was much to be said on both sides of the question. I left them at that point."

"Do you like Sir Edmund?"

"I wish you would not ask me."

"Why?"

"Because he hates me, and I won't own to a *passion malheureuse*. He nearly overturned poor Mr. Farnley to-day at dinner, in trying to avoid the chair next me."

"Oh, no; it was in trying to get the one next Miss Middleton," observed Rosa Moore, with an innocent expression of countenance.

Mrs. Ernsley continued without noticing the interruption,

otherwise than by a downward movement of the corners of her mouth — "I had a thousand times rather be hated by him, than be liked in the way in which he seems to like any one, *qui lui tombe sous la main.*"

"No doubt," said Henry; "next to being loved there is nothing like being hated."

"You think so too, then?" said Mrs. Ernsley.

"Certainly," he replied. "It gratifies one of the strongest tastes, or rather passions, of one's nature; that of feeling emotion one's self, and exciting it in others. If I could not see the woman I loved agitated by her love for me, I had rather see her tremble, shudder even at my presence, than look as if Mr. Manby had come into the room."

"What a detestable lover you would make!" exclaimed Mrs. Ernsley. "Always, by your own admission, on the verge of hatred."

He laughed, and said, "It is an old saying, that love and hatred are closely allied."

"Not more so than hatred and contempt," I said; "and in incurring the one, one might, perhaps, gain the other."

Both my companions looked at me with surprise, for I had not joined before in their conversation, and a secret feeling (I was aware of it) had given a shade of bitterness to my manner of saying it.

Mrs. Ernsley seemed to take the remark as personal to herself; but said good-humouredly, though somewhat sneeringly, "Since Miss Middleton has pronounced so decided an opinion, we had better drop the subject. What is become of Edward Middleton, Mr. Lovell?"

"He has been abroad for some months," replied Henry; and Sir Edmund Ardern, who at that moment joined us, said, "The last time I saw him was at Naples last February; we had just made an excursion into the mountains of Calabria together."

"A very unromantic one, no doubt," said Mrs. Ernsley, "as everything is in our unromantic days. Not a trace of a brigand or *of an adventure I suppose?*"

"None that we were concerned in. But we saw an ex-brigand, and he told us his adventures."

"Did he really?" exclaimed Miss Farnley; "and was he not adorable?"

"Not exactly," said Sir Edmund with a smile; "but some of his accounts were interesting."

"Was he fierce?"

"No, not the least. I fancy he had followed that line in his younger days, more because his father and his brother were brigands, than from any inclination of his own. One of the stories he told us struck Middleton and myself in a very different manner."

"What was it?" I asked, unable to restrain my anxious curiosity.

"I am afraid you may think it long," said Sir Edmund; "but if you are to decide the point in question you must have patience to hear the story: —

"Lorenzo, that was our friend's name, had been engaged in several skirmishes with the gendarmerie, that had been sent into the mountains to arrest the gang to which he belonged; he was known by sight, and had once or twice narrowly escaped being seized. He had a personal enemy among the gendarmes — a man called Giacomo, whose jealousy he had excited some years previously at a country fair. They had quarrelled about a girl whom both were making love to. Lorenzo had struck him, and Giacomo had not returned the blow before they were separated, and his rival safe in the mountains beyond the reach of his vengeance. He brooded over this recollection for several years; and when he found himself, at last, officially in pursuit of his enemy, he followed him as a hungry beast tracks his prey. One evening, with two or three of his men, he had dodged him for several hours. Lorenzo had made with incredible speed for a spot where, between the fissures of the rock, he knew of a secret passage by which he could elude the pursuit, and place himself in safety. He strained every nerve to turn the corner before his pursuers could be upon him, and mark the place where he disappeared. Between him and that *corner, there was* now nothing left but a slight wooden bridge

thrown over a precipice. As he was rushing across it, Giacomo, with the instinctive feeling that his enemy was escaping him, by one tremendous leap from the top of the rock which overhung the bridge, reached it at the same moment. The shock broke to pieces the frail support; the hand-rail alone did not give way, and to this, by their hands alone, the two men clung. They were close to each other — they looked into each other's faces — neither could move. Lorenzo's eyes were glazed with terror; Giacomo's glared with fury; he was nearest the edge, his men were in sight, and he called to them hoarsely. Lorenzo gave himself up for lost. At that moment, above their heads, on the edge of the rock, something moved — both looked up. A blow, a tremendous blow, fell on Giacomo's head; his features grew distorted, they quivered in agony — a yell of torture escaped him: another blow, and his brains flew upon the face and hands of his foe. A mist seemed to cover Lorenzo's eyes; but he felt something stretched out to him — he clung to it instinctively, he scrambled, he darted into the cavern, he fainted, but he was safe."

"And who had saved him?" we all exclaimed.

"Amina, a girl whom he was courting, and by whom he was beloved. She was carrying home to her father a large sledge-hammer which he had lent to a neighbour. Passing alone through that wild region, she saw the desperate situation of the two men, recognised her lover struggling with the gendarme, heard the shouts of the latter to his comrades, and rushed to the spot."

"A brave girl," exclaimed Henry.

"How did the *romance* end?" asked Mrs. Ernsley.

"Ah! there 's the point," said Sir Edmund. "I asked Lorenzo if he did not love the girl twice as much since her gallant conduct. 'I was very grateful to her,' he answered, 'but I was no longer in love with her.' I exclaimed in astonishment, but he persisted; it was very odd certainly, she had saved his life, and he would have done anything to serve her; 'But you know, gentlemen,' he added, 'one cannot help being in love, or not being in love; and when I *looked* at Amina's black eyes, I could not help *shuddering, for I remembered* the look they had, when she gave

Giacomo that last blow, and it was not pleasant, and in short I could not be in love with her, and there was an end of it.'"

"And is it possible," exclaimed Mrs. Ernsley, "that he was so ungrateful as to forsake her?"

"No; he told me he would have married her, if she had wished it, but she did not; 'Perhaps,' he said, 'she saw I was no longer in love with her; but she did not seem to care much, and there was an end of it,' as he said before. Now I own I cannot understand the fellow's feeling; if anybody had saved my life, as Amina saved his, I really believe I should have fallen in love with her, had she been old and ugly; but a handsome girl, whom he was in love with before, that she should lose his heart, in consequence of the very act for which he should have adored her, passes, I confess, my comprehension. But Edward Middleton disagreed with me; he thought it perfectly natural. 'It was hard upon her,' he said, 'and could not be defended on the ground of reason; but there were instincts, impulses, more powerful than reason itself; and unjust and cruel as it might seem, he could not wonder at the change in Lorenzo's feelings.'"

"How strange!" said Henry Lovell; "how like Edward, too; though not quite so moral and just, as he generally piques himself upon being."

"Ay," said Sir Edmund, "I must do him the justice to say, that he added, 'Had I been Lorenzo, I should have felt myself bound to devote my life to Amina, to have made her happy at the expense of my own happiness; but there is, to me, something so dreadful in life destroyed, in death dealt by the hand of a woman, under any circumstances whatever'" —

As Sir Edmund was saying these last words, I felt the sick faint sensation that had been coming over me during the last few minutes, suddenly increase, and he was interrupted by Mrs. Ernsley exclaiming, "Good Heavens, Miss Middleton, how pale you look! are you ill?"

Mrs. Brandon, who heard her, rushed to me; by a strong effort, I recovered myself, swallowed the glass of water she *brought*, and walked to the piano-forte, where Rosa Moore was *singing*.

I laid my head on the corner of the instrument, and as my tears fell fast, I breathed more freely. When, later, Sir Edmund apologised to me for having made me ill with his horrid story, and Henry whispered to me, "Mrs. Ernsley has just announced that you are of the same species as Miss Farnley, who cannot hear of death, or of wounds, without swooning, but that you are only a somewhat better actress," I was able to smile, and speak gaily. Soon after, I went to bed; as I undressed, I thought of these lines of Scott: —

"O! many a shaft at random sent,
Finds mark the archer little meant;
And many a word, at random spoken,
May soothe or wound a heart nigh broken."

That night I had little sleep, and when I woke in the morning, my pillow was still wet with tears.

CHAPTER VI.

"Yes, deep within and deeper yet
The rankling shaft of conscience hide;
Quick let the melting eye forget
The tears that in the heart abide.
* * * * * *
* * * * * *
Thus oft the mourner's wayward heart
Tempts him to hide his grief and die;
Too feeble for confession's smart —
Too proud to bear a pitying eye."

CHRISTIAN YEAR.

THE following day was Sunday, and some of us drove, some of us walked, to the village church. It was about two miles distant from the house by the carriage road, but the path that led thither by a short cut across the park, through a small wood, down a steep hill, and up another still steeper, and then by a gentle descent into the village, was not much more than a mile in length. It was a beautiful walk, and the view from the top of that last hill was enough to repay the fatigue of scrambling up that winding path, exposed to the burning heat of the sun, and that is not saying a little. As the last bell had not begun to ring, we sat down on the *stile on the brow of the hill*, to wait for it, and in the meantime I

looked with delight on the picture before my eyes. The little foot-path wound down through the daisy-enamelled grass to the edge of a pond of clear water, that lay between the field and the road, and was shaded by half a dozen magnificent oaks, elms, and horse-chesnuts, beyond the little village, which did not seem to contain more than seven or eight cottages, each half-buried in trees, or overgrown with creepers, except one red brick house, that flared in all the pride of newness, and of the gaudy flowers in its spruce little garden. In the middle of the irregular square, or rather of the wide part of the village road, for it could not be called a street, stood a tall May-pole, still adorned with two or three faded remnants of the streamers which had decorated it a month before. On an eminence beyond the village stood the church; one of those small old beautiful parish churches, with one square gray tower, and two wide porches; around it grew yews and thorn trees, of various shapes and sizes, intermingling their white flowers and dark foliage in graceful contrast.

After a few moments' rest we walked on to the churchyard, and sat down upon a tombstone close to the principal porch. All the people of the village were assembled, sitting, or standing in groups, waiting for the clergyman's arrival. Mr. Brandon was just telling me, in answer to my expressions of admiration for a picturesque, ivy-grown old wall and house, which formed one of the boundaries of the churchyard, that they were part of the ruins of an ancient palace of King John's, when the carriage arrived, and we all went into church. It looked smaller still within than without, but its rude architecture had something religious as well as rustic about it, and the simple singing of the morning hymn by the school children seemed in accordance with it. As usual my mind wandered during the whole of the service, and though I knelt when others knelt, and stood when they stood, and though my lips mechanically repeated the responses, I never prayed except when occasionally some words in the Liturgy or in the Bible struck upon the secret feeling of my heart, and drew from it a mental ejaculation, a passionate appeal to Heaven, which was rather the cry of a wounded spirit than a direct address to the God between *whom and* my soul I felt as if the link of communion was broken.

That day, however, little as I regularly attended to the service it had a soothing effect upon me. There was an old monument exactly opposite our seat, to which my eyes were continually reverting. It was that of a knight crusader and of his wife; their statues were lying side by side, in that rigid repose which unites the appearance of sleep and of death. There was peace in each line of those sculptured figures — an intensity of repose, the more striking from its association with some of the emblems of war. As I looked upon them I longed to be resting too.

The clergyman was reading the morning lesson at that moment, and these words attracted my attention, "And they all fell seven together, and were put to death in the days of harvest; in the first days in the beginning of barley-harvest; and Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah, took sackcloth, and spread it for her upon the rock, from the beginning of harvest, until water dropped upon them out of Heaven, and suffered neither the birds of the air to rest on them by day, nor the beasts of the field by night."

These words seemed to answer my thoughts; why I cannot tell, perhaps no one but myself could understand what that connection was, and yet it struck me so powerfully that I felt as if a chink had suddenly opened, and given me a glimpse into another world. There was quietness and confidence and strength, in the midst of torture, agony, and despair. The mother, who had lost all her sons, and that by an ignominious death, sat upon the rock days and nights, and she spread sackcloth upon it, and she slept not by night, and she rested not by day, but drove away the birds of the air and the beasts of the field, and verily she had her reward; their bones were gathered together by the King's command, and they buried them there. She had her meed, I might have mine at last; I could weep and pray, fast by day and watch by night, give up the joys of life, the hopes of youth; cease to banish the remembrance of the past, but in quiet penitence, in humbled contemplation bear it ever in mind, and carry about with me, through a long life perhaps, the dagger in the wound, till at last the day might come when my own heart would absolve me, and Edward Middleton would pity me.

After the service the clergyman announced his intention of ad-

ministering the holy sacrament on the following Sunday, to all such as should be religiously and devoutly disposed. For the last year I had always listened to this address either with a feeling of dogged indifference, or, if my heart was less hardened than usual, with a pang of shame and grief; but always with a determination to remain banished from the altar, excommunicated by my own conscience. Now for the first time, I listened with a somewhat different feeling; I longed to kneel there, and as I looked at the clergyman while he preached, and marked his white hair, his venerable countenance, and the benevolence of his manner, a sudden resolution occurred to me; I would open my heart to him; I would tell him all; I would, for once, pour out the secret anguish of my soul to one who neither loved nor hated me; to one who would tell me what my guilt had been, — who would promise me its pardon, and point out the path of duty to my blinded sight. I felt feverishly impatient to accomplish this determination; and when we came out of church, and Mr. Brandon asked me if I would walk or drive home, I said I would drive, so as to make the walkers set out without me; and then I drew Mrs. Brandon aside, and told her, that as I had heard that the afternoon service was at half-past two o'clock, I should wait for it, and in the mean time walk about the churchyard and the village. She made some objections to my remaining alone, which was inevitable if I stayed, as all the men had walked on, and the women would none of them be inclined to miss their luncheon; but at last yielding to my earnest wish, she said she would herself come to afternoon church, in order to fetch me back.

I saw them all drive off, and the village people slowly leave the churchyard in different directions, and sat myself down on the same tombstone as in the morning to watch for Mr. Leslie. It was some time before he came out of church, and when he did he remained for several minutes in conversation with the clerk at the door of the porch. At last he dismissed him, and walked my way; he seemed doubtful whether he should stop or not, as he passed me, but I got up, and this decided him.

He smiled, and asked me if I had been forgotten and left behind?

"No," I said, "I am only waiting here, as there is hardly time to go to the house and come back before afternoon church; and this is a pleasant place to spend an hour in."

"I am glad you like our old churchyard," said Mr. Leslie; and then he began talking of the views, of the neighbouring scenery, of the ruined palace now transformed into a farm, of all the subjects he thought would interest me, little thinking that at that moment the secret of a life of anguish, the confession of an over-burthened conscience, was trembling on my lips. The more he talked, too (although there was nothing unsuitable to his sacred office in anything he said), the more I felt to lose sight of the priest of God — of the messenger of Heaven, in the amiable, conversible, gentlemanlike man before me; however, when he pulled out his watch, and apologised for leaving me, pleading a promise he had made to visit a sick parishioner, I made a desperate effort, and said: "May I ask you, Mr. Leslie, to allow me a few moments of conversation with you before the hour of afternoon service, if you can spare time?"

He looked surprised, but bowed assent, and said he would return in half an hour. During that half hour I sat with my face buried in my hands, feeling as if able to count every pulsation of my heart. The excitement under which I had acted was past; I trembled at the idea of what my lips were going to utter; I felt as if I had escaped a great danger; I was astonished at myself for ever having formed such a resolution; and when Mr. Leslie stood before me again, and asked me, with a smile, what my business with him was, I could as soon have destroyed myself in his presence, as have pronounced the words of self-accusation, which had appeared to me so natural and so easy when he was in the pulpit and I on my knees in church. But he was there, and he was waiting for my answer, and my cheeks were flushing, and I knew that the next moment I should burst into tears. With a desperate confusion I drew my purse, which contained several sovereigns, from my pocket, and asked him to distribute it among the poor of the village. He seemed puzzled, but thanked me, and said he *should be happy* to be the dispenser of such a liberal *donation: and I darted* away from him, unable to bear the shame

and the misery I was enduring; for now it seemed to me that I had added hypocrisy to my guilt; that I had hardened my heart against the best impulse I had yet experienced, and that I had deceived the minister of God, whose praises sounded like curses in my ears.

I attended the afternoon service in a more reckless mood than ever; and that day at dinner, and during all the evening, was more feverishly gay, more wildly excited than usual; and Henry Lovell, who seemed struck with the strangeness of my manner, for the first time made love to me without reserve. The language of passion was new to my ears; his words made my heart throb and my cheeks burn; but even while he spoke, and while under the influence of a bewildering excitement, which made me feel, for the time, as if I shared his sentiments, I once thought of the crusader. I saw a pale, calm face, with its well known features, under the warrior's helmet; and I felt that to lie down and die by his side would be happiness compared to such a life as mine.

A few days after this, we were all sitting in the drawing-room at about twelve o'clock; the day was not tempting, and instead of going out, we had settled to work, while Sir Edmund and Henry alternately read out loud to us; but Rosa Moore, when she heard the plan proposed, screwed up her lips into a decided expression of disapprobation, and slipt out of the room with the look of a child who has escaped its lesson. Two hours after she came in again, and sat down quietly in a chair opposite me; she looked red and out of breath, but a look of mischief and amusement was sparkling in her eyes. She listened patiently to the conclusion of the tragedy, which Sir Edmund was reading well, though rather too theatrically for the occasion; and when the different remarks upon it had subsided, she turned to Henry, and with perfect gravity, but a most mischievous look in her eyes, said to him, "Mr. Lovell, I am sorry to have to break it to you, but, upon pain of death, we must marry immediately."

"I never dreamt of such an honour," said Henry, laughing; "*but if there* is no other alternative, I can resign myself. But *who lays* down this law?"

"A gentleman who shortened my walk this morning, for I had no intention of coming home before the end of the tragedy."

"Who can you mean?"

"Somebody who must be either your best friend or your worst enemy, by the interest he seems to take in you."

"What *do* you mean?" said Mrs. Brandon.

"Only that as I was exploring the thicket near East Common, I heard a rustling in the hedge, and suddenly stood face to face with an individual of not very prepossessing appearance."

"What kind of man, my love? you frighten me to death."

"Why he was not like a gentleman, nor yet like a countryman; not like anything good in its way. He opened our interview by laying hold of my arm."

"How dreadful!" "What did he say?" "What did you do?" "How shocking!" "How did you get away?" "I should have died on the spot;" was echoed with different sorts of emphasis round the table.

"Why, I told him I had five shillings and sixpence in my purse, in case it was agreeable to him to take them."

"Did he?"

"No, here they are quite safe; he did not want to take my money, but to give me advice, he said," and Rosa burst into one of her merriest peals of laughter.

"What did he say to you exactly? Now pray be serious, Rosa," cried Mrs. Brandon, impatiently.

"This is what he said, 'Hark'ee, my duck, do you marry that 'ere chap, that Mr. Lovell what 's a courting you, and the sooner the better, for if you don't it will be the worse for you and for him, and for some one as shall be nameless. It will be the saving of his life, if you mind me my pretty gal.' He added this, as I wrenched my arm away, and was taking to my legs."

"And he let you go?"

"No, he caught hold of me again, and begged for an answer. I am afraid I should have promised to marry Mr. Lovell, or to kill him, or anything else that was expected of me, in order to get away, when another *man joined us*, and muttered, 'Fool, you are dropping the Brentford ticket at Hammersmith gate.' Upon which my

friend screwed up his mouth into a particular shape, gave a kind of whistle, and both darted away among the bushes; and here I am."

I looked round to see how Henry took this account, but he was gone. Mrs. Brandon noticed also his disappearance, and left the room. Mrs. Ernsley, Sir Edmund, and the eldest Miss Farnley drew round Rosa, to hear her recount again her adventure, and the youngest Miss Farnley whispered to me: "Mr. Lovell must be in love with Miss Moore, for I never saw a man more strangely agitated; but it is an odd story; what do you think it can mean?"

"Perhaps it is a hoax," I said; for I had a vague wish that the whole thing might be hushed up. I felt frightened — I thought it evident that Rosa had been taken for me, and I could not help thinking that the two men she had fallen in with, were those I had seen at Salisbury. Henry's agitation and his sudden disappearance confirmed my suspicions, and I felt the more tormented from having no one near me, to whom I could impart them. When we went into the dining-room to luncheon, Mrs. Brandon looked flushed and worried; she told Rosa that Henry had gone towards the East common, to see if the men who had frightened her, and used his name for that purpose, were lurking in that direction; that Mr. Brandon had sent the gamekeeper and some of his men to make inquiries in the neighbourhood about these fellows, and directed that they should be brought up for examination before him as a magistrate, if they could be found. Rosa proposed to me to ride with her and all the men of the party, that afternoon, and scour the park, the neighbouring woods and downs, in search of the men. Curiosity, and an intense desire to ascertain if I was right in my suppositions, made me agree to this plan. We were soon off, and galloping across the park. Rosa was in tearing spirits; she had been somewhat alarmed in the morning, but the idea of a *quiproquo*, the amusement of a practical riddle, the fun of pursuing her assailant, (whose offence had not been of a nature which would make its results to him so serious as to check any levity on the subject) tickled her fancy exceedingly, and she kept her companions in a continual roar of laughter. We rode about in different directions for nearly two hours, but, except a few

labourers, we met no one. As we were walking our horses through a dell, that divided the upper part of East common from a wood of beautiful oaks, that stretched for miles beyond it, Mr. Manby suddenly exclaimed, "There are two men scrambling over a hedge in the direction of Ash Grove. Now, Miss Moore, for a desperate effort." We all looked in the direction where he pointed with his whip, and all set off at once at full speed. There was a small ditch between the field we were in, and the one we were making for; all the horses took it at a flying leap, except mine, who positively refused to budge. In vain I struck him and urged him on; he began rearing violently, but would neither jump nor walk over it; the groom begged me to get off, while he dragged it across; I did so, and walked on a little to try and find a place where I could step over the ditch myself. I stopped a minute to look at a clump of ash trees, surrounding a little ruined hut, which I thought would make a lovely sketch. At that moment the door of the hut opened; a man came out and looked cautiously about him — It was Henry — two others followed him; the very men I had seen at Salisbury; these last turned into a lane which I knew led into the high-road to Blandford, and were out of sight in a moment. Henry stood still for an instant, and then walked off towards the house. I was not surprised, but my heart sickened within me. I felt a vague pity for Henry, a nervous terror for myself; it never occurred to me to point out the two men, or draw attention to the spot where I had seen them dissappear.

In the meantime the groom had brought a plank, by means of which I crossed the ditch; I got on my horse again, and rode slowly on to meet the rest of the party, who were galloping back in great amusement, at having mistaken Mr. Leslie and his clerk, who had been quietly clambering over a stile, on their way to the cottage of a sick old woman, for the dangerous characters they were in search of. We came up with Henry a few yards from the house. He looked ill and tired; Mr. Brandon hallooed to him, to know if he had seen or heard anything of the vagabonds.

"Have you?" was his answer.

"No," cried Mr. Brandon.

"*Well then, Miss Moore,*" (said Henry, with a forced laugh,)

"we must e'en wed to-morrow, or remain single at our peril," and he walked off, humming the tune of "*Gai, gai, marions-vous.*"

The subject of Rosa's adventure was now and then resumed, and became a sort of standing joke against Henry; evidently a disagreeable one to him, though he put a good face on the matter.

One day he asked Rosa, if she had not been laughing at us all, and whether the whole thing was not a practical joke. He took to twitting her about her visions, and proposed to write a ballad on "the two invisible men of Brandon Woods," on which I said, "And I will write a sequel, which shall be called 'The ruined Hut of Ash Grove.'"

Mrs. Ernsley looked at Sir Edmund, as much as to say, "What a silly attempt at a *répartie;*" and said in a hesitating manner, "I do not *quite* see what would be the *point* of that."

Henry looked as if the ground had suddenly opened and shut again before his eyes.

CHAPTER VII.

Turn to the watery world; but who to thee
(A wonder yet unviewed) shall paint the sea!
Various and vast, sublime in all its forms,
When lulled by zephyrs, or when roused by storms,
Its colours changing, when from clouds and sun,
Shades after shades, upon the surface run. CRABBE.

And therefore, since I cannot prove a lover
To entertain these fair well-spoken days,
I am determined to prove a villain. SHAKSPEARE.

Two or three weeks now elapsed, without the occurrence of anything worth relating; but in which I was much struck with two entirely new features in Henry's character, which were gloom and irritability. At times he was still as agreeable as ever, but the least coldness on my part, or the commonest kind of attention paid me by others, seemed to exasperate him beyond any attempt at self-government. He was once on the verge of insulting Sir Edmund Ardern, because I had talked to him for an hour together; *and there* was nothing touching in the fierce jealousy which he

showed on these occasions. When under its influence, he seemed absolutely to hate me, and sometimes he quite frightened me by his violence. However, when that had been the case, he would suddenly recollect himself, and then, by his ardent expressions of passionate affection; by the grief, the misery, he pleaded in justification of his violence; by the words of eloquent appeal, of tender entreaty, which seemed to spring from the very depths of his heart; he moved, he agitated, he persuaded me; and, half in weakness, half in self-deception, partly from the fear of losing the excitement of being adored by one who fascinated my mind, though he did not touch my heart, I tacitly encouraged him in the belief that I returned his affection.

On the 7th of July, after I had been about a month at Brandon, I received a letter from Mrs. Middleton, the purport of which was, that my uncle desired me to return immediately to Elmsley; that she was sorry that he was so positive about it, as she saw by my letters that I was amused there; that she would have been more able to withstand him on the subject, and to obtain for me a prolongation of my visit, had it not been that the very circumstance which had occasioned his decision, was one which, from motives which I could well understand, she could not discuss with him, and in which she could take no part; "and that, my love (she added), is my brother's unexpected visit to Brandon. I have seldom seen your uncle so much irritated as when he heard of his going there; and it was with difficulty that he refrained from writing by return of post to desire you instantly to come home. This would, however, have caused a sort of sensation, which, he felt himself, was undesirable; but now, he will hear of no delay, and my maid will arrive at Brandon the day after you receive this letter, and you will set off with her on the following morning. I think it right to tell you, dearest child, that Mr. Middleton, in speaking to me of Henry the other day, expressed his determination *never* again to allow him to make up to you, or you to encourage in him the least hope of a marriage, which he is perfectly resolved never to give his consent to. He has desired me to tell you so, and to write to Henry to the same effect. You know (as we have often said to each *other,) your uncle dislikes* Henry, and that makes him, no doubt,

more positive still on the subject than he might otherwise be; but I must admit myself, that my brother having no fortune whatever, and not having ever set about in earnest following up any profession, a marriage with him would be not only undesirable for you, but, in fact, impossible.

"You may be surprised, my own dearest child, at my speaking to you in this way of an affair which, perhaps, you yourself have not taken into consideration. I earnestly *wish* that Henry may not have made such an impression upon you, as to make this warning necessary; but, after what I saw here — though perhaps too late — and what I have heard goes on at Brandon, I scarcely venture to hope so.

"I will not talk to you, my own Ellen, of the happiness which your return will give me: you are the joy of my life; the star in my dark night; my best beloved, my precious child. If your tears should flow, if your young heart should ache, come to me, dearest, and lay your head on my bosom, and find in my love, which shall know no change, 'a shelter from the storm, a refuge from the tempest.'"

I pressed to my lips Mrs. Middleton's letter, but remained agitated by a number of conflicting feelings. She seemed unhappy, and I could not help thinking, that besides the anxiety she expressed about the state of my feelings, she was also grieved at my uncle's harsh decision against her brother. I was vexed too at being *ordered* back to Elmsley, I had been spoiled by unlimited indulgence, and unvarying tenderness, and though bitter sorrow had come upon me, and I had gone through severe suffering, it had not come in the form of discipline, or been turned to its salutary use. I dreaded the monotony, the associations of Elmsley, from which I saw, by this letter, that Henry was henceforward to be banished; and, altogether, when I walked into Mrs. Brandon's room, and announced to her my approaching departure, tears of vexation stood in my eyes.

She said a great deal of her own regret, and proposed writing *immediately* to Mr. Middleton to entreat him to let me stay on *longer, and* urged me to wait for his answer, but this I could not

venture to do. My uncle was a man who seldom gave an order, but when he did, I knew it was not to be trifled with.

I did not state to Mrs. Brandon the *real* reason of my recall; but she gave me to understand that she knew it, and I did not repulse as much as usual, her implied sympathy.

We went down into the drawing-room together; and when Henry appeared, I watched his countenance to try and gather from it, if he too had received the letter which his sister had been desired to write to him; but he puzzled me completely. He was absent and pre-occupied, but did not seem the least depressed; on the contrary, there was a kind of excitement about him, that gave him the appearance of being in high spirits. When Mrs. Brandon spoke of my summons to Elmsley, and the rest of the company were, in their different ways, making civil speeches to me, he said nothing, but in his turn watched me narrowly.

He did not sit next to me at dinner, which I thought, with a little contrivance, he might have done; nor did he come near me during the first part of the evening, but seemed entirely engrossed by a long eager whispering conversation which he kept up with Mrs. Brandon.

At tea-time, she came up to Lady Wyndham and Mrs. Ernsley, and asked if it would suit them to make a party the next day to the sea-side. There was a beautiful little bay about twenty miles off, which would make an excellent object for an expedition, and which she would like to show me, before I left Dorsetshire. It so happened that I had never in my life seen the sea, except from a distance, and this made the idea of this excursion particularly agreeable to me. Everybody approved of it; for once everybody was like Mrs. Hatton, and liked nothing so much as an expedition, and more especially one to the sea-side, so it was settled that we were to be off at eight the following morning. Except in general conversation, Henry did not speak to me that evening, till, as he was lighting a candle for me, near the refreshment table, he said in a low voice, "Have you ever been so interested in a book that you have been obliged to shut it up, and to pause before you opened it again?"

"*No,*" *(I answered,)* "I always look at the last page."

"I dare not look at my last page," he said, and his voice trembled. At that moment I thought I liked him.

At six o'clock the next morning, in my dressing-gown and shawl, I was at the window of my bed-room anxiously examining the state of the weather, and trying to stretch my head beyond the corner of the house, in order to find out whether there might not be a very little bit of blue sky visible behind an ominous mass of gray clouds; but either my head would not go far enough, or else there was no blue sky to be seen, and each survey only tending to discourage me more thoroughly, I laid down again, and tried to go to sleep. At seven my maid came in, and informed me that it was a dull morning, but the carriages were to come round all the same, and the ladies were getting up. We met in the breakfast-room, with the weary, cross, sick-looking faces, which early rising, especially on a gloomy day, is apt to produce. In the first carriage went Lady Wyndham, Mrs. Brandon, Mr. Ernsley, and Mr. Moore. In the second, Mrs. Ernsley, the two Miss Farnley's, and Sir Edmund Ardern; Rosa Moore and myself had a pony-chaise to ourselves, and the rest of the men rode. By the time we had reached the gates of the park, the clouds began to break, and to sail across the sky, in white fleecy shapes. Soon the sun himself appeared after a desperate struggle with the clouds that hung about him. Then the birds began to sing in the hedges, and every leaf to glitter in the sunshine, while Rosa, who had been yawning most unmercifully, and, in the intervals, holding her pocket-handkerchief fast upon her mouth to keep the fog out of it, brightened up, and began talking and laughing, as if she had not been forced out of her bed at an unusual hour. We drove through lanes, such lanes as Miss Mitford loves and describes; through villages, each of which might have been *her village*, in which the cottages had gardens full of cabbages and sun-flowers, and the grass plots had geese and pigs and rosy children; through which little girls were walking to school in their straw bonnets and blue checked aprons, and stopped to stare and to curtsey to the grand people that were driving by; in which boys were swinging on gates, and urchins were dabbling in ponds in company with ducks that seemed *hardly more* amphibious than themselves, and then we drove by

parks and lawns, — parks sloping, wooded, wild; lawns studded with beds of flowers, the red geranium or the glowing carnation, forming rich masses of dazzling brilliancy on the smooth surface of the soft green grass. How beautiful they were on that day, that July day, "the ancestral homes of England," as Mrs. Hemans calls them; streams of sunshine gilding their tall elms, their spreading oaks and stately beeches. How that bright sunshine danced among their leaves, and upon the grass amidst their roots, and how the berries of the mountain ash glowed in its light, — the mountain ash, that child of the north, which with its sturdy shape, its coral fruit, and the gray rock from which it springs, looks almost like a stranger in the midst of the more luxuriant foliage of the south. But scarcely two hours had elapsed, when we turned a corner in the road, and for the first time the sea lay stretched before my eyes. It was rough; the waves were crested with foam; and already I heard them break with that sullen roar, with that voice of the ocean, in which, as in the thunder of Heaven, we instinctively recognise the voice of God. We drove up to the little inn where the horses were to be put up; I could hardly wait for the step of the carriage to be let down, and hastened alone to the beach; the sea was not, as I have seen it since, blue and calm, glittering with a thousand sparks of light; not like some quiet lake which ripples on the shore, and murmurs gently, as it bathes the shining pebbles in its limpid wave; no, it was as I would have chosen to see it for the first time, stormy, wild, restless, colourless from the everlasting fluctuation of colour, brown, purple, white, yellow, green, in turns; billows over billows chased each other to the shore, each wave gathering itself in silence, swelling, heaving, and then bursting with that roar of triumph, with that torrent of foam, that cloud of spray, that mixture of fury and of joy, which nothing in nature, but chafed waters combine.* O God, I have suffered much; terror, remorse, agony, have wrung my heart, have shattered my nerves; I have been guilty; I have been wretched; I dare not thank thee for the tumultuous joys of passion, for the feverish cup of pleasure, hastily snatched, and as suddenly dashed to earth; but *I will thank thee*, for the swelling of the heart, for

* *See Coleridge's* beautiful lines on the Avalanches.

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the lifting up of the soul, for the tears I have shed, for the ecstacy I have known on the sea-shore, in the forest, on the mountain. The heart knoweth its own bitterness; but there is also a joy with which the stranger intermeddles not.

We wandered for some time on the beach, and then began scrambling among the cliffs, and clambering up to the various rocky points from whence the little bay and its wooded coast were seen to most advantage. In doing so, we gradually separated into different parties, and Mrs. Brandon, Rosa, Henry, and myself, went to explore a small cavern, where there were some curious sands of various colours, which Mr. Brandon had described to us the day before.

Rosa was on her knees upon the ground, collecting specimens of each; I was looking at the sea through a natural window in the rock; when Mrs. Brandon asked her if she had got all she wanted, and begged her, if she had, to walk back with her to the inn, as she wished to order luncheon, and speak to Mr. Brandon about the arrangements for our return.

I was preparing to follow them, when Henry laid his hand on my arm, and said in so serious a voice that it quite startled me, "For my sister's sake, Ellen, stay with me here a few moments; we will walk back by the downs; I have much to say to you, and this is my last opportunity."

I stopped immediately, and leant against the entrance of the cavern.

Henry was as pale as death, his lip was quivering, and his hand shook violently as he took hold of mine.

"Ellen," he said, abruptly, "do you know that I love you, as much as a man can love, — more than words can express? Do you know, do you feel it, Ellen?" And he wrung my hand with nervous violence.

"Has your sister written to you?" I asked, with a trembling voice.

"She has. What will you do?"

"What *can* I do?"

"Do you care for me?"

"*I am sorry* to part with you."

As I said these words, I hid my face in my hands, and from nervous agitation, burst into tears.

"Then we shall *never* part!" he exclaimed. "Then to-morrow, at this hour, you shall be mine — mine for ever, beyond all human power to part us! — mine, to worship, to adore, to live for, to die for! Ellen, do you hear me? Speak to me! Answer me! Shall this be? Shall it be? Why do you look so pale and so cold?"

"You are raving, Henry, you are raving; you frighten me, you hurt me; let me go."

I rushed out of the cavern, and sitting down on a stone by the sea-side, cried bitterly.

When I looked up, Henry was standing before me, waiting for my next words with forced calmness; but as I remained silent, he made a strong effort over himself, and said quietly, "I will explain to you what I mean; I am not going to make love to you now; I have not time to tell you what I feel, and what you know as well as I do; but thus much I must tell you, my sister is right when she says that your uncle will *never* consent to our marriage: he never will, Ellen; and if we part *now*, we part for ever; and God only knows the misery which hangs over both our heads if we do."

I raised my head at these words, and looked at him with surprise; he had no right to assume that such a separation would make me miserable; my pride was wounded, and spoke in my eyes: he read their language, and went on: —

"This is no time for girlish resentment; forgive me, Ellen; I make you angry, but when the fate of a whole life, and more than one life, hangs on the decision of an hour, it is no time for weighing words; and mine must be few. Mrs. Brandon knows that I love you, and *how* I love you! she thinks too that you love me. She is well acquainted with her brother's inflexible prejudices, with his stubborn character; she received from your dying mother a charge to shield and protect you; should he ever turn against you, and make you unhappy by the sternness of his conscientious but iron nature, she will obey that charge; she will go with you to-morrow to the church at Henley, and stand by us while we —"

"*Stop, Henry, stop*, I cannot, will not, listen to such words

as these. You ask me to marry; to seal my fate, against my uncle's will, without my aunt's consent; you ask me to add another drop of sorrow to the cup already too bitter and too full. That *I* should do this! Oh, my God, he asks me to do this, and I sit by and listen; Henry, I almost hate you for the thought."

"Can you believe," he rejoined, "that *she* would not bless you for the act? Can you think that when she hears that the child of her adoption, the child of her love, has saved from anguish, from despair, from guilt, the brother whom she nursed in his cradle, whose mother she was, as she has been yours, — can you think that she will not pronounce a secret but fervent blessing on your head? She obeys her husband's stern commands, Ellen, but her heart aches for us. Oh! for her sake, in the name of your dying mother, whose letter Mrs. Brandon will show you; for my sake, for your own; I implore you not to drive me to despair! for again I repeat it, unutterable misery, which you do not, which you cannot, now understand or foresee, awaits you, if you should refuse to yield to my entreaties."

"Henry, you speak a strange language, and I must know the truth. I am tired of doubts; I am tired of fears; I am weary of my life; and I must speak. What unknown misery do you threaten me with? What are your secrets? Ay, I must know them!" And in my turn, I seized his arm, and pushing away the hair from my forehead, I looked him full in the face. "Why am I to avoid the Tracys? Why do vulgar ruffians use your name to terrify me into a marriage with you? Why am I now to be forced into a secret marriage, and at a day's notice? and if your ungovernable passions are not instantly gratified, why are you to plunge into guilt and into despair?"

Frightened at my own violence, I sat down breathless and trembling. He on the contrary had grown calm, and there was almost a sneer on his lips as he answered, "Those vulgar ruffians are relatives of the Tracys, and, for their sakes, I wished to spare them an exposure which would have been of no use to any one. I believe that they meant no more than a foolish practical joke, of which the account was highly coloured by Rosa Moore; but you *can easily* understand that such people would not be desirable ac-

quaintances to make, and I, therefore, recommended you to keep away from a house where you might meet them. As to the misery that you may bring upon yourself, Ellen, if you return to Elmsley, I may not, perhaps, fully make you feel it; but when I tell you, that your uncle, determined as he is to prevent your marrying me, is as much determined to make you marry Edward Middleton, you may, perhaps, form some idea of it."

"Marry Edward," (I muttered to myself,) and then shuddering at the recollection of the words he was reported to have said — I cried, "No, no; that can never be."

"No, *never*," said Henry, in a solemn voice. "There is a gulf between you which can never be filled up."

"What, what?" I cried with a sensation of terror.

"Did you not say just now yourself, Ellen, that such a marriage never could be? But you know not what persecution would be employed in order to bring it about. Poor Julia's death was, in a worldly sense, a great advantage to you. It made you at once a rich heiress." (I could not stifle a groan of anguish, but Henry went on as if he had not heard it.) "I happen to know that your uncle has settled the whole of his property upon you in the event of your marrying Edward; but I also know that he will disinherit either of you who should refuse to comply with that condition."

"I never will consent to it. Let him have my uncle's fortune; let me be banished from Elmsley; but nothing shall ever make me agree to what would degrade him and myself."

"Then, Ellen," eagerly exclaimed Henry; "then, Ellen, if such is your resolution, do not hesitate an instant more. Once married to me, you are safe in my arms from dangers which you do not dream of, which I dare not point out to you. Ellen, I tremble for myself and for you if you should refuse me. Together, we may have trials to meet; but parted, they will be fearful. We *must* meet them together. Our fates are linked in a strange mysterious manner. There is a similarity in our destinies, and if you leave me now —"

He paused, his voice was choked with the violence of his emo*tion; the reckless, the daring* Henry Lovell was weeping like a

child. Oh, then again I thought I liked him, for I knelt down by his side, I took his hand in mine, I bathed it with my tears, and I whispered to him that I would promise anything, that I would plight my faith to him, do anything but consent to the secret marriage he proposed.

Again and again, he urged it with increasing vehemence, with ardent supplications. Once he said, "Ellen, you are destroying my happiness and your own; but not ours alone; you know not what you do. The fate of a pure and innocent existence is at this moment in your hands; do not doom it to secret anguish, to hopeless sorrow. Have mercy on yourself, on me, on her!"

In vain I pressed him to explain himself; he only protested, over and over again, with still greater agitation, and even swore that we must be married now or never; that it was useless to speak of the future. He spurned every alternative, and every promise I offered to make; till, at last, indignant and irritated, I exclaimed, as I got up and turned towards the town, "Well, then, let it be so; let us part for ever; everything is at an end between us."

He rushed before me, stopped me, held both my hands in his iron grasp, and with a countenance that one could hardly have recognised as his own, so dreadful was its expression of rage, he said, "No; all is *not* at an end between us. We do *not* part for ever. *Now*, even at this moment, I could bring you on your knees at my feet; I could force you to implore my pity, my forbearance, ill-fated, unhappy girl, whom I love with that fierce love, which idolises one hour and hates the next. No, we do not part for ever; through life I shall be at your side, either to worship and adore you, to be all in all to you, in spite of man and laws, and duties and ties; or else to haunt your path, to spoil your joys, to wring your soul. Ellen, I must be the blessing or the curse of your life. *Never* shall I be indifferent to you. You have refused, in ignorance, in madness, you have refused to be my wife. You shall be my victim! Either you shall love me as wildly, as passionately as I love you, and weep with tears of *blood that you* spurned me to-day; or if ever you love another, I

will stand between him and you, and with each throb of love for him, there will be in your heart a pang of fear, a shudder of terror, a thought of me. This is our parting — you would have it so — farewell!"

He rushed back to the sea-shore; I walked on, unable to collect my thoughts. When I arrived at the inn, I found everybody at luncheon. There was a great deal of conversation going on, and discussions as to the time and manner of our return; I felt bewildered, and scarcely understood the meaning of what was said.

Mrs. Brandon, in pity for me, I suppose, took Rosa's place in the pony-chaise; she did not say much to me, but had the kindness to allow me to lean back, and cry in quiet. She evidently thought that never had there been a girl so in love, or so broken-hearted before. She was very good-natured, but there was a shade of pique in her manner, which probably arose from my refusal to avail myself of her help for the secret marriage which had been proposed.

We arrived late at Brandon. I was obliged to go to bed with a raging head-ache — found that Mrs. Swift, my aunt's maid, had arrived — took leave of Mrs. Brandon, and of the other women in the house, in my room that night — did not see Henry again — and at seven o'clock the following morning was already at some distance from Brandon, on my way to Elmsley.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Why did he marry Fulvia and not love her?"

SHAKSPEARE.

My journey back to Elmsley was every way a very different one from that which I had made from it a month before. The weather was cold and windy, and the absence of sunshine made every object we passed appear less attractive than the impression which my memory had retained.

Sir Walter Scott remarks, in one of his novels, that good humour gives to a plain face the same charm as sunshine lends to an ugly country. I agreed entirely with him, as I looked first on

Salisbury Plain, without one gleam to diversify its gloomy extent, and then on Mrs. Swift's unmeaning face, the stern rigidity of which never relaxed into a smile, and contrasted it with the cheerful light of dear Mrs. Hatton's radiant, though certainly not beautiful features.

I had much to think about, but I found it difficult to define and collect my ideas. Henry and I had parted in anger, and it was almost with a curse on his lips that he had taken leave of me. He, too, knew my secret; he, too, used that knowledge to threaten and terrify me. Had Edward betrayed it to him, since he left England? or was it he who had denounced me to Edward? Alas! it mattered little which it was. I was stunned, I felt as if one by one all those whom I cared for would upbraid and forsake me. A dreadful recollection remained on my mind of something which Henry had said in that last conversation, of Julia's death having been a great worldly advantage to me, and of my uncle having settled his fortune upon me. My blood ran cold at the thought—a marriage with Edward was the condition annexed. The Exile's dream of the home to which he can never return, the Desert Traveller's vision of water which he can never approach, are to them what to me were those words,—a marriage with Edward. Something which in the shadowy dreams of girlhood had hovered in my fancy; something which the terrors and the trials of the last year had crushed and subdued; something which in the feverish excitement of the last months had been dimmed but not destroyed; something which survived hope, and rose again in the silence of the soul when the restless stimulus of outward excitements failed. But it could never be! How could I ever stand in the place of that wretched child whose image would rise between me and the altar if ever I ventured to approach it, as my uncle's heiress, as Edward's bride? *His* Bride! The very sight of me had rendered Elmsley insupportable to him; the knowledge of my guilt (for guilty I was, though guiltless of the dreadful consequences of my ungovernable impetuosity) had driven him from England. Was he not Julia's cousin? Was not Julia's death the work of my hand? And had not Henry said that her death had been an advantage to me? He *had; and then* he spoke of bringing me down upon my knees before

him to implore his pity; he poisoned his weapon, and then dealt the blow. *His* pity! Oh, as I thought of that, I longed to see him but for one moment again, if only to tell him that I spurned his pity, despised his forbearance, and that, taught by himself, I had learned one lesson at least, which I should never forget, and that was to be revenged! And in the struggle he had begun, I felt myself the strongest, for I did not love him; in that last scene the truth had been revealed to myself as well as to him. The slight links which bound me to him, had in a moment snapt; but *he* loved me, with a fierce and selfish love indeed, but still he loved me; and if there is torment in unrequited love; if there is agony in reading the cold language of indifference in the eyes on which you gaze away the happiness of your life, that torment, that agony, should be his. These thoughts were dreadful; I shudder as I write them; but my feelings were excited, and my pride galled nearly to madness. I remember that I clenched with such violence a smelling-bottle, that it broke to pieces in my hand, and the current of my thoughts was suddenly turned to Mrs. Swift's exclamation of "La, Miss! you 've broken your bottle, and spilt the Eau de Cologne! What could you have been thinking of?"

What had I been thinking of? Oh that world of thought within us! That turmoil of restless activity which boils beneath the calm surface of our every day's life! We sit and we talk; we walk and we drive; we lie down to sleep, and we rise up again the next day; as if life offered nothing to rouse the inmost passions of the soul; as if hopes tremblingly cherished were not often dashed to the earth; as if fears we scarcely dare to define were not hovering near our hearts, and resolutions were not formed in silence and abandoned in despair; as if the spirit of darkness was not prompting the soul to deeds of evil, and the hand of God was not stretched out between us and the yawning gulf of destruction. And others look on; and, like Mrs. Swift, wonder what we can be thinking of. God help them! or rather may He help us, for we need it most.

At the end of the second day we reached the well-known gates of Elmsley, and in a few moments more I was locked in my aunt's embrace. I *wept bitterly* as I kissed her, and she seemed to consider my tears as perfectly natural; her whole manner was sooth-

ing and sympathising. My uncle received me kindly enough, though rather coldly even for him. I longed to explain to Mrs. Middleton that I did not care for Henry, and that my uncle's decision against him was not the cause of the deep depression which I could neither struggle with nor conceal; but how could I disclaim *that* cause and allege no other? Also the intimate intercourse which had been formerly habitual between her and myself had been broken up, so that my heart had become as a sealed book to her, and I dared not open it again; its one dark page formed an invincible barrier to that communion of thoughts which had been ours in bygone days.

And so days and weeks went by; I heard nothing of Henry nor of Edward, though both were almost constantly before my mind's eye; in this perpetual wear and tear of feeling my health began to give way, and I grew every day paler and thinner.

About three months after my return to Elmsley, I was sitting one afternoon at that library window where I mentioned once before having often watched the sunset with Edward. The autumnal tints were gilding the trees in the park with their glowing hues, and the air had that wintry mildness which is soothing though melancholy. The window was open; and, wrapped up in a thick shawl, I was inhaling the damp moist air, and listening to the rustle of the dried leaves which were being swept from the gravel walk below; the low twitter of some robin-redbreasts was in unison with the scene, and affected me in an unaccountable manner. My tears fell fast on the book in my hand. This book was the "Christian Year;" that gift of Edward, which I had thrust away in a fit of irritation about a year ago. I had opened it again that morning; and, partly as a kind of expiation, partly with a vague hope of awakening in myself a new tone of feeling — something to put in the place of that incessant review of the past, around which my thoughts were ever revolving, — I forced myself to read a few of the passages marked with a pencil. I had been interrupted while so doing, but had carried away the book with me, and now again applied myself to the same task. I read stanza after stanza which spoke of guilt, of suffering, and of remorse; but *I did not close* the book in anger as before. It was true that they

were carefully chosen, pointedly marked; but what of that? Was I not guilty? Was I not wretched? Did I not deserve worse at his hands? Nay more; *had* I deserved the forbearance, the mercy, he had shown me? Ought I not to bless him for them? It was such thoughts as these that made my tears flow, but that at the same time soothed the bitterness of my feelings.

I put down my book; and, while gazing on the darkening clumps of trees before me, I watched the approach of the boy who was riding through the avenue to the house, with the letter-bag strapped before him. I heard the step of the servant who was crossing the hall on his way to my uncle's study. In a few moments I heard Mrs. Middleton's voice on the stairs; and, about an hour after that, when it was getting quite dark, and I was leaving the library, I met Mrs. Swift, who told me that my aunt wished to speak to me in her dressing-room.

There is something very apt to make one feel nervous in the fact of being sent for; and if it happens to be immediately after the arrival of the post, all the more so. I walked up-stairs in consequence with a kind of feeling that something had happened or was going to happen; so that when I opened the door, and saw at one glance that my aunt was much agitated and in tears, I felt frightened.

"What has happened?" I exclaimed. "What is it? Who is ill?"

"Nobody — nothing of that kind," she replied, "but it is painful" (she paused, struggled with herself, and went on) — "it is painful, and you must prepare yourself, my dear child, to hear something that will shock and grieve you. Henry" (she looked into my face with intense anxiety) — "Henry has made us all very unhappy, but *you*, my child, *you*" (she seized both my hands and put them upon her eyes, as if to give herself courage to speak) "it will make you miserable. What shall I say to you, my own love? He is utterly unworthy of you; he has forgotten you, Ellen — given up all thoughts of you; he is —"

"Is he going to be married?" I eagerly exclaimed; "speak, dearest aunt, speak — is it so?"

"He *is* married" (she replied in a tone of deep dejection), "*disgracefully married!*"

She looked up in my face, and seemed quite bewildered at the expression of my countenance. I was expecting her next words with breathless anxiety, and could only repeat, "To whom, to whom?"

"You could not have imagined it," she answered — "you could not have believed it possible; he has married that girl whom you saw at Bridman — Alice Tracy."

Married to Alice Tracy! Was it possible? What a crowd of conjectures, recollections, suppositions, and fears, rushed upon me at that moment!

"What does he say about it? What does he write? When did it happen? May I see his letter?" were the questions which I addressed with breathless rapidity to Mrs. Middleton, who seemed entirely taken aback by the manner in which I received this startling intelligence.

"Here is a strange letter," she said, "from Henry himself; another from my father, who, as you may imagine, is indignant; and one from Mrs. Tracy, which is at once impertinent and hypocritical. I hardly know whether I am acting rightly in showing you Henry's. It *is* so extraordinary; but you must explain to me several things which I have never hitherto questioned you about; and, perhaps together, we may find out the secret of this wretched marriage. I have not ventured to show this strange letter to your uncle; he thinks that it is only from my father that I have heard of Henry's marriage; and I am afraid I am doing wrong in letting you see it; but I am so bewildered —"

I interrupted her by drawing the letters almost forcibly out of her hand. She suffered me to do so, and watched me while I read them. I was conscious of this at first; but the interest was so absorbing, that I soon forgot her presence, and everything, but the letters themselves. I read Henry's first: it was as follows: —

"My dear Sister,

"You have known me long enough not to be surprised at any extravagance that I may be guilty of. You know also that I am somewhat of a fatalist, and that I maintain that our destiny in life *is marked out for* us in a manner which we can neither withstand

nor counteract. I have just done what is commonly called a foolish thing — very likely it is foolish; all I can say is, that I could not help doing it. It *is* done, and therefore the fewer remonstrances or lamentations that are made on the subject the better. I am married. Last Thursday I married, at — Church, Mrs. Tracy's grand-daughter. Her name is Alice; she is very pretty, and has been well brought up. She has five thousand pounds of her own, left her by an uncle, who died some time ago. I have, as you know, about as much. My father, of course, refuses to see her; and, I conclude, Mr. Middleton will do the same. Do you remember, Mary, the time when, sitting at my bedside, you would kiss my forehead, and tell me how you would love my wife? We used to talk of her, and describe her. She was to be tall; her eyes were to be dark, and their long fringing lashes were to sweep her cheek; her throat was to be white and graceful as a swan's; genius was to give light to her eyes, and eloquence to her words; and you, sister, *you,* on my marriage-day, were to have placed the blossoms of orange flower in the dark hair of my bride. You remember it, don't you? Well, my bride is fair, very fair; but not like the bride we had imagined — or rather that we had foreseen; for, sister, we *have* seen her, have we not — walking in beauty by our sides? Have we not gazed upon her till we have fancied her a thing too bright, too lovely, for the earth she treads upon? My bride was not kissed by you; she stood by my side, and you were not there to say, 'God bless her!' She put her cold hand into mine, and looked steadily into my face; there was no colour in her cheek; no emotion in her voice. It was all as calm as the life that lies before me. Mary, you had better write and wish me joy; and tell Ellen to wish me joy too; but do not show my letter to your husband; it is not calm enough for his inspection.

"Yours, dear Mary, ever yours,

"Henry Lovell."

There was something inexpressibly painful to me in the tone of this letter; it seemed the sequel of one part of my last conversation *with Henry; a pure and* innocent existence, he had said, must

be sacrificed, and doomed to hopeless disappointment, if I persisted in my refusal. I had persisted, and Alice was sacrificed, though to what I knew not; but to some mysterious necessity — to some secret obligation. A loveless marriage — a lonely passage through life — and God only knew what secret trials — what withering of the heart — what solitude of the soul — what measure of that hope deferred, which makes the heart sick — of that craving void which nothing fills, were to be hers, who had grown up and blossomed like the rose in the wilderness, and who had been, like her own poor flower, too rudely transplanted, doomed perhaps like it, to wither and to die. It was strange, that, never having seen Alice but once, I should have felt such a deep and complete conviction of her goodness and purity, of the angelic nature of the spirit which was shrouded in that fair form, that as the idea of guilt in her intercourse with Henry, so now, that of worldliness, of ambition, or of indelicacy, in having made this secret marriage, never presented itself to my mind. Perhaps it might yet turn out well; he might grow to love and to prize her, and she would stand between him and me like an angel of peace. He could not but admire the faultless beauty of her face; the poetical nature of her mind; the calm simplicity of her character. I said this to myself; but while I said it, my heart whispered a denial. I knew Henry too well. I had seen too clearly what he admired in me — what subdued him in some measure to my influence, even in his fiercest moments of irritation. It was the very points in my mind and character which were most different from hers. The very defects in myself, that made me look upon her, as a lost and ruined sinner might gaze on a picture of the blessed Virgin, these very defects were what riveted and enthralled him. His last words rang in my ears as I looked on his blotted and hasty signature, and my heart sunk within me as I *felt* "that all was *not* over between us."

The next letter I read was from Mr. Lovell; it was thus worded: —

"My dear Mary,

"Your affection for your brother has always been so great, *that I dread* the effect which my present communication will have

upon you. It will take you by surprise, as it has done me. That Henry should give us subjects of regret and annoyance would be no strange occurrence; but that he (the goodness of whose understanding, at least, has never been called in question) — that he should have acted in so deplorably foolish a manner, is more than one would be prepared for; the natural refinement of his character alone might have preserved him from a connection which is really disgraceful. It is better to tell you the fact at once, for you certainly could never have imagined or foreseen such an event. Your brother, without having made the slightest communication to me, or to any one else, as far as I can find out, married, last Thursday, at Bromley Church, the grand-daughter of the woman who was your nurse, and afterwards his. He looks wretchedly ill and unhappy, and gives no explanation of his conduct, further than by repeating, that as he was certain that I would not give my consent to his marriage (and he is right there), he thought it best to put the matter at once beyond discussion. In some ways, bad as it is, it might have been worse. I find that the girl is only seventeen — very handsome — has been well brought up for a person in her rank of life, and has a fortune of 5000 *l.* I have refused to see her, as I am determined to mark my indignation to Henry in the strongest manner; and I never, under any circumstances, will consent to see her relations, who have behaved, in my opinion, as ill as possible in hurrying on this marriage.

"Some time hence, it may be advisable to notice his wife; and, for his sake, to try as much as possible to withdraw her from the society and the influence of her relations; but this will be a subject for after-consideration.

"And now, my dear Mary, God bless you. I feel for you, as I know you will for me, in this unpleasant affair. I hope your beautiful Ellen will not take to heart this abominable marriage. Mr. Middleton was perfectly right in preventing her from throwing herself away on that worthless brother of yours; but I wish with all my heart they had eloped together.

"Your affectionate Father,

"William Lovell."

Mrs. Tracy's letter was as follows: —

"MADAM,

"The announcement of Mr. Lovell's marriage with my granddaughter, Alice, will probably have surprised you disagreeably. As he has, I find, written by this day's post to communicate it to you, I take the liberty of addressing to you a few lines on the subject. I grieve that myself or any one belonging to me should be the means of causing you grief or annoyance. But, Madam, remember who it was that said, 'Judge not, and you shall not be judged; condemn not, and you shall not be condemned.' Obey that injunction now, and visit not the sins of others on an angel of goodness and purity, — the dust of whose feet, some whom you cherish in your bosom are not worthy to wipe off. I love you, Mrs. Middleton, and would not willingly give you pain; but do not try me too severely by ill-usage of that child, whom my dying son bequeathed to me, and who is now your brother's wife. As God will judge one day betwixt you and me, be kind to her; her presence and her prayers may sanctify your home, and bring down a blessing on your head. If you are tempted to say in your heart, 'Why did this angel of goodness and purity consent to a secret marriage? — why did this saint, whose prayers are to bring down a blessing on our home, enter our family without our sanction?' — if you are tempted to say this, Mrs. Middleton — yet say it not. Alice has lived alone with her flowers, and with her Bible. She has never opened a novel; she has never conversed with any one but me, and with him who is now her husband, and that but little. She knows nothing of the world and its customs. She was asked as Rebecca was asked — 'Wilt thou go with this man?' and she said 'I will go.' I told her it was her duty to marry Mr. Lovell, and she married him; and if you should say, Mrs. Middleton, that it was *not* her duty to marry him, and that I deceived her as well as you, — again I say, 'Judge not, condemn not;' and thus you may escape a fearful judgment — an awful condemnation."

"Is not that letter the very height of cant and impertinence?" said my aunt, as I laid it down on the table.

"*It is a strange* letter," I answered; "but what she says of

Alice I am certain must be true. It tallies exactly with the impression she made upon me, and with what I should have supposed her part to have been in the whole affair."

"But how can her grandmother justify her own conduct to herself, if it is so?"

"God only knows," I answered; "but if you love me, my dearest aunt, — if you wish me to be happy, — if my supplications have any weight with you....."

"*If* they have, Ellen?"

"No, no!" I exclaimed, — "not *if* — I will not say *if* they have, for I *know* they have. I know you love me, and I know that you will do all you can to make Henry happy with Alice. I shall not have a moment's peace if they are not happy."

"Angel!" said my aunt, as she pressed her lips to my cheek. I drew back with a thrill of horror.

"Never call me an angel, — never say that again: I cannot bear it. I am not disclaiming, — I am not humble, — I am only cowardly. I cannot explain to you everything; indeed, I hardly know if I understand myself, or Henry, or anything; but thus much I do know, that if Alice Tracy has gained his regard — wildly as he talks in that strange letter — if she has a hold on his affections, I shall bless her every day of my life, — she will have saved me from inexpressible misery. Oh, my dearest dear aunt, — write to Henry, write to Alice to-day, — immediately: do not wait for my uncle's permission — write at once."

I seized on the inkstand, and putting paper and pen before her, I stood by in anxious expectation. She sighed heavily, and then said to me: —

"Ellen, will you never again speak openly to me? If you did not care about Henry, what has made you so wretched lately? Why are your spirits broken? — why is your cheek pale and your step heavy? You deceive yourself, my child; you love Henry, and it is only excitement that at this moment gives you false strength."

"Whether I ever have loved Henry," I replied, "is a mystery to myself. I think not; — indeed I believe I can truly say that I never loved him; though at one moment I fancied that I did; and if, yesterday, you had come to me and told me that my uncle had

consented to my marrying him, — nay, that he wished me to do so; — had you yourself asked me to marry your brother, I should have refused — yesterday, to-day, always."

"Then you have quarrelled with him," quickly rejoined Mrs. Middleton; "and this marriage of his is the result of wounded feeling, — perhaps of a misunderstanding between you. Poor Henry!"

There was a little irritation in my aunt's manner of saying these last words; and I was on the point of telling her what Henry had proposed and urged upon me in our last interview, and of thus justifying myself from any imputation of having behaved ill to him; but I instantly felt that this would be unfair and ungenerous, especially at this moment. Besides, was I not in his power, and could I venture to accuse him who held in his hands the secret of my fate? So again I shut up my heart, and closed my lips to her who loved me with a love which would have made the discovery of that fatal secret almost amount to a death-blow.

She seemed now to understand better my anxiety for the happiness of her brother and of his young wife. She seemed to think that I was conscious of having, in some manner or other, behaved ill to Henry, and driven him to this marriage, and that I was anxious to make all the amends in my power. But when she had drawn the paper before her, and was beginning to write, she put down her pen, and exclaimed: "But if he does not love her, what induced him to choose *her?* To make us all wretched! — to inflict upon himself such a connection! I cannot understand it!"

Again and again she cross-questioned me about Alice, about that one memorable visit of mine to Bridman Manor, about Henry's manner to her, and hers to him. I answered in the way best calculated to remove her prejudices, to allay her anxieties, to encourage her hopes of eventual happiness for Henry. My angry feelings with regard to him had for the time quite subsided; I pitied him from the bottom of my heart, and remembered what he had said of a similarity in our destinies. It seemed to me, that he too was bound by some stern necessity, by some secret influence, to work mischief to himself and to others; and it was with intense eagerness that after Mrs. Middleton had written a kind and

soothing letter to him (in which she expressed the hope that when in London, where we were going in three months' time, she should see Alice, whom she was prepared to receive and to love as a sister) I sealed it, and gave it to the servant who was just setting off for the post town. She wrote a few lines also to Mrs. Tracy, in which she expressed, in severe terms, her sense of the impropriety, if not of the guilt of her conduct with respect to her own grandchild, as well as with regard to a family, whose indignation she could not but feel that she had justly incurred. Her letter to her father she did not communicate to me. Mr. Middleton took little notice of the whole affair. One day that his wife was beginning to discuss the subject before him, he said, "My dear Mary, there are persons and things about which the less is said the better, and your brother and his marriage are of that number." Another time, when she remarked to him that I was looking much better, he observed, "I am glad that she has come to her senses." Now and then there came letters from Henry to Mrs. Middleton, but she never showed them to me. When I made any inquiries about them, she told me such facts as that he had taken a small house in —street; that he had been with his father once or twice, but that he still refused to see Alice. When I asked if Henry seemed happy, or at least contented, she answered that it had always been difficult to make out his state of mind from what he wrote, and now more so than ever; and then she would abruptly change the subject. My intense curiosity, my still more intense anxiety to hear about them, seemed to give her the idea, that, though my pride had been wounded, I still cared for him. Indeed so much of my future peace of mind turned upon the direction which his feelings would take, that my manner was probably well calculated to give this impression. In despair of overcoming it, unable to speak out, too proud to repeat what I saw she did not believe, I shut myself up in that resolute silence, in that systematic reserve, which had now become habitual to me; but I looked forward to our journey to London with nervous anxiety, and saw the time for its approach with a mixture of hope and *fear*.

CHAPTER IX.

"Dans le sein du bonheur que son âme désire,
Près d'un amant qu'elle aime et qui brûle à ses pieds,
Ses yeux remplis d'amour, de larmes sont noyés."

* * * * * *
* * * * * *

"Vous me désespérez;
Vous m'êtes cher sans doute, et ma tendresse extrême
Est le comble des maux pour ce cœur qui vous aime."
"O ciel! expliquez-vous, quoi toujours me troubler,
Se peut-il?" "Dieu puissant, que ne puis-je parler?"

About three weeks before the 1st of March, which was the day fixed upon for our removal to town, I had been taking a long ride, and came home at about four o'clock. My habit was wet and heavy, and I walked with difficulty across the hall, up-stairs, and along the passage which led to my room. As I was passing before the door of what was called the south bed-room, my eyes suddenly fell on two trunks covered with mud, and on the brass plates of which was stamped the name of "Edward Middleton, Esq." At the same moment the door opened, and he stood before me. I felt myself turning as white as a sheet, and was obliged to lean against the wall to prevent myself from falling. He seized my hand, and said, with apparent cordiality, "How are you, Ellen?"

I do not know what I said to him; there was a mist before my eyes, a murmur in my ears, and a feeling about my heart that I was strangely happy, though dreadfully frightened. Soon I was alone in my room, with my feet on the fender, and my eyes fixed on the burning embers, and repeating to myself over and over again, "How are you, Ellen?" and then I remembered that he knew *all*, that he had seen *all*, that he had left Elmsley because he could not bear to stay, knowing all he did, and I trembled; and hiding my face in my hands, I cried as if my heart would break. Then a new thought came to me, and brought an extraordinary peace with it. I would tell him everything, and he should decide what I ought to do; his decision should be law to me; I would submit to it humbly, and obediently, although it might be that I was never to see again any of those whom I loved, and spend my *future life in lone*liness and penance.

The dressing-bell rang; my maid came in with a muslin gown on her arm, and some camellias in her hand, and there was again a flutter at my heart, as if dressing and going down-stairs and dining, had been as different things yesterday from what they were to-day, as the tamest prose is from the most exciting poetry.

When I opened the door of the library, Edward was sitting with his back towards me, talking eagerly to Mr. Middleton; as I approached them I heard him say, "If I could only be convinced of it, nothing on earth would make me so happy."

As my uncle turned his head, he did so too, and coloured when he saw me. I sat down on the sofa by the chimney; and every corner of that old library seemed to me in some way different from usual. I did not wish Edward to speak to me; on the contrary, it was enough to feel that he was there; that at any moment, by looking up, I could meet his eyes, and to know instinctively when his were fixed on mine. When I fancied myself in love with Henry Lovell, it was chiefly while he was talking to me, in the height of discussion, in the excitement of conversation. When I had not seen him for some hours, I was impatient to see him, and speak to him again, in order to prove to myself that I liked him; but with Edward it was not so. Alas! would it not have been for me the most dreadful misfortune to have loved him? Was not there, as Henry had said, a gulf between us, which could never be filled up? Would he not have shrunk from my love as from a poisonous thing, and have recoiled from the touch of my hand as from a serpent's sting?

Tears gathered in my eyes at this thought; I felt them tremble on my eye-lashes, and brushed them hastily aside as I walked into the dining-room with my uncle. Edward talked of his travels, of various persons whom he had made acquaintance with, in France and in Italy, of English politics, and the approaching session. There was nothing in his conversation peculiarly adapted to my taste; and yet I listened to each word that fell from his lips with an interest which my own feelings stimulated to the highest pitch.

In the evening he asked me to sing to him, and as he leant his head on his hand, and sat in silence by my side, listening to song *after song which he* had known and liked in former days, I felt my

heart grow fuller, till at last my voice failed, and in its place a choking sob rose in my throat. He raised his head abruptly, and looked at me sternly. "It is only that I am a little nervous," I said; "I have taken a long ride, and being tired —"

"Oh, pray make no explanations," he replied; "excuses are perfectly unnecessary;" and he suddenly left the pianoforte.

He spoke to me no more that evening; but the next day he treated me again as he had done at first, and even seemed in some ways more satisfied with me than he had ever been before.

I have never yet described Edward, and I do not think I could describe him. He was always unlike anybody else, and yet it would have been difficult to point out any peculiarity in him. It was not only truth, it was *reality*, that marked his character. He never was, never could be, anything but himself; and, like all perfectly true characters, could not even understand those that were not so, and judged them too severely, or too leniently, from the impossibility of putting himself in their place. His manner was always calm; even emotion in him never partook of the semblance of agitation. Where others were angry, he was stern; a few simple words from him always carried with them a strength of condemnation, which crushed under its weight any attempt to resist it. From a child I had been afraid of Edward, and he had never perfectly understood my character; now that I had so much reason to fear him, in some ways I felt more at my ease with him, because as I had ceased to express all my feelings, and pour forth my thoughts before him, I dreaded less the severity of his judgment.

During the next two or three weeks that he was at Elmsley, I felt in his presence as a criminal before his judge; his sternness was justice, his kindness was mercy; and, in the softened tones of his voice, and in the tenderness of his eyes, I only read the tacit grant of a pardon, which mine mutely implored. This gave to my whole manner, to my disposition I might almost say, for the time, a humility, a submission, which were in no wise affected, but which did not naturally belong to my character. Edward's was despotic, as well as uncompromising; perfectly conscientious *himself, strict* in the discharge of every duty, he exacted from

others what he performed himself. He allowed of no excuses, of no subterfuges, and ranked the weakness that shrinks from suffering in the accomplishment of what is right, in the same line as that which yields to the allurements of pleasure, or the temptations of guilt. In many respects he resembled my uncle, but still the difference between them was perceptibly great. Edward's feelings were stronger; it was impossible to observe the depths of thought manifested in his eyes, and in his pale, high forehead; to hear the sound of his voice, when he addressed those he loved; to see the colour rise slowly in his cheek, as he spoke of some act of virtue, of heroism, or of self-conquest, without the conviction that powers of heart and mind, not an atom of which were frittered away in vain words and empty fancies, were at work within him.

Once he spoke to me of Henry's marriage, and told me he had seen him in London. They had met accidentally in the street; and he had offered to go and call on his wife; but Henry had made some excuse or other, and the visit had not taken place. He did not add one word regarding Henry's conduct, or what view he had taken of it himself, but looked earnestly into my face, as if he expected me to speak first on the subject; but seeing I was silent, at last he said, "Ellen, was this marriage a disappointment to you?"

"It was a relief to me."

"How so?"

"Because I had deceived Henry, and *almost* deceived myself into the belief that I liked him; and his marriage proved to me how much I had been mistaken."

Edward took my hand and kissed it; I drew it away with great emotion, and exclaimed, "Good God, don't you know what you are doing?"

He did not say another word, and left me abruptly.

For two days afterwards, he spoke to me but little; and when he did so, his manner was cold.

One day that we were taking a walk together in the park, after one or two insignificant observations had passed between us, Edward asked me if I had ever received the book which he had left for me the year before. As usual, I had it in my pocket; I took

it out, and gave it to him, without making any other answer. He opened it and turned the pages over as we walked along.

"*Now* is the time come," I said to myself; "*now*!" and the blood forsook my heart, and my legs seemed to fail under me.

In a moment of morbid irritation, I had written on the blank page of the book, the words which had remained coupled in my mind with this gift of Edward's: "Beware; I know your secret!" and now they were before his eyes; and now he was reading them; and now the explanation was at hand; and all that I had suffered before was as nothing, compared to what I had wilfully brought on myself.

He turned to me, and said with a smile, "What do those mysterious words mean?"

I felt as if I was dreaming, but as if in my dream a mountain had been removed from my breast. I laughed hysterically, and said they meant nothing. That was the first time I lied to Edward.

He said that I must have read the book attentively, for he saw that it was marked in different places; *he* had never marked a book in his life; it was a thing that never occurred to him to do; and then he gave it back to me; and it felt to me as if the air had grown lighter, and the sky bluer, and as if my feet sprang as by magic from the ground they trod on.

When, that evening, I was with Edward again, I looked up into his face, and talked to him as I had not talked to him for nearly two years; I laughed gaily, as in days of old; I saw with exultation that he laughed too, and that he asked Mrs. Middleton to play at chess with my uncle, instead of him, and that he did not leave my side till the last moment that I remained in the drawing-room; and I was foolishly, wickedly happy, till I went up to my room, and laid my head on my pillow; *then* came, in all its bitterness, the remembrance, that, although *he* might not know my secret, *another* did; that if, indeed, he loved me, as I now thought he did (for I remembered that letter to Henry, which I had so long misunderstood, and now recognised its true meaning), — if indeed he loved me, I must, I ought, to tell him the *truth; and then* he would despise me, he would hate me, and

only for the deed itself, but for my long silence, — for my cowardly concealment. No; I had suffered too dreadfully during those minutes when I had felt myself on the brink of unavoidable confession; — that happen what might, I would not, I could not, disclose to him the *truth*. But should I, then, marry him? Should I inherit my uncle's fortune? Should I become one day the mistress of Elmsley; and, from the midst of all that this world can give of joy, look, as Belshazzar looked on the hand-writing on the wall, on the torrent where my own hand had hurled Mrs. Middleton's child, Edward's cousin; and one day, perhaps, be denounced, betrayed, exposed, by Henry Lovell, whose words began that night to be realised: — "With every throb of love for another, there will be in your heart a pang of fear, a shudder of terror, a thought of me!"

Hour after hour I tossed about my bed, unable to close my eyes in sleep; at times, in spite of everything, feeling wildly happy; at others, forming the most solemn resolutions, that neither the weakness of my own heart, or the persecutions of others, should induce me to think even of marrying Edward, and yet unable to conceal from myself, that the next time I saw him, the next time my eyes met his, they would betray to him all that long-subdued and unconfessed love which had now grown into a passion astonishing to myself, and ruled my undisciplined mind beyond all power of restraint and control.

In the morning I fell into a short and uneasy slumber, in which, twenty times over, I was confessing my history to Edward, or standing by him at the altar, or else being dragged from his side by Henry, or by my uncle. The visions of sleep, and the thoughts of the night, were strangely mixed up in my mind when I woke; tired and jaded with all I had gone through, I went downstairs on the morning of the 28th of February, which was the eve of the day of our departure for London.

In the breakfast-room, I found Edward, who asked me with some surprise, how I came to be so late, and if I did not mean to go to church?

"*To-day, why to church* to-day?" I inquired.

"It is Ash Wednesday," he replied, "the most solemn fast-day in the year."

"Oh, in that case, I will go at once, and do without breakfast; no great self-denial, for I am not in the least hungry." I put on my bonnet and shawl, and we set off on foot together, Mr. and Mrs. Middleton having previously gone on in the carriage. I was very feverish, and from want of sleep and absence of food together, I felt in an unnaturally excited state. Whenever Edward spoke to me, I gave a start, and when I spoke myself, it was with a sort of nervous irritation, which I could not command; at last he seemed displeased, and when he stood still, to give me his hand, in crossing the stile, at the entrance of the churchyard, I saw in his face that stern expression which I had begun to know and to dread. We went into church; the service was already begun; it is, as it should be on such a day, a solemn and an awful service. The Epistle for the day, that mournful and merciful appeal to the conscience, the Penitential Psalms, which seem to embody the very cry of a bruised and overwhelmed heart, everything struck the same chord, spoke the same language; to my excited imagination, every word that was uttered seemed as if it was addressed to me alone, of all that assembled congregation. Every moment my head was getting more confused, and my soul grew faint within me. And then, when I was not in the least expecting it, (for I had never before paid any attention to the service for Ash Wednesday,) all at once there rose a voice which said, in what sounded to my overwrought nerves, an unnaturally loud tone:

"Brethren, in the Primitive Church there was a godly discipline, that, at the beginning of Lent, such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin were put to open penance, and punished in this world, that their souls might be saved in the Day of the Lord; and that others, admonished by their example, might be the more afraid to offend."

I believe that at that moment I fell on my knees, but nothing remains very distinctly in my recollection, except that soon the *solemn curse* of God was pronounced on unrepenting sinners, and *as each awful* denunciation was slowly uttered, there rose from the

aisles, from the galleries, from each nook and each corner of the house of prayer, the loud cry of self-condemning acknowledgment.

Again, again, and again it sounded, and died away. Once more it rose and fell; and then the voice from the pulpit proclaimed, "Cursed is he that smiteth his neighbour secretly;" and that time I did not hear the voice of the multitude respond. I heard a low deep *amen* uttered at my side; and *that amen* was to me as a sentence of eternal condemnation. I fainted, and when I recovered my senses, I was in the vestry with my aunt, and the doctor of the village. Soon I was able to walk to the carriage, and to drive home with Mrs. Middleton.

When I saw Edward again, his manner was gentle and affectionate; and I was myself so wearied with emotion, so exhausted with hopes and fears, that I had grown calm from mere fatigue. I was more determined than ever not to marry Edward, and this resolution gave me a kind of melancholy tranquillity, which allowed me to speak to him with more self-possession than before. I had also a vague idea that, by making this one great sacrifice, I should entitle myself to seek the consolations of religion, after which my soul yearned, especially since the terror which that day's service had struck into my heart; but still I shrunk from the one act which would have given me real peace; as I put into words the account I could give of Julia's death; I fancied I saw before me Edward's countenance, stern in condemnation; or overcoming with difficulty its expression of horror and dismay; or, worse still, incredulous, perhaps, and unable to believe that where there was not crime, there could have been such concealment; as I pictured to myself all this, and foresaw the nameless sufferings of such an hour, the cry of my soul still was, "Never, never, will I marry him! but *never*, also, will I own to him the secret which would make him turn from me with disgust and horror."

We were to set out for London at an early hour the next morning, and before we parted for the night, Edward followed me to the music-room, where I was putting by some books to take with us for the journey.

He stood by me in silence for some time, and then said,

"Ellen, it is better, before we part, even for a short time, to understand each other. I have long been attached to you. I gave you up and went abroad, when I thought you were in love with Henry. I tried in vain to forget you. *Now*, Ellen, is there hope for me? Will you be to me, what you alone *can* be — the blessing that I would prize beyond all earthly blessings — will you be my wife?"

I looked at him; he was pale, and his eyes were full of tears. As mine were raised to his, I knew, I felt that they spoke such unutterable, such passionate love, that when, with a voice hardly articulate, I said in the slow accents of despair, "No, I cannot be your wife;" it seemed to me that he must have read into my heart.

He took my hand, and only said in a low voice, "Why?"

"Because," I exclaimed, with a burst of tears, "because I am utterly unworthy of you."

He let go my hand, and seemed to be struggling with himself: at last he said, "Ellen, if you mean that you feel now that you cared more for Henry Lovell than at one time you fancied, if there is still some affection for him in your heart, it is no doubt a painful trial for me to hear it; but if you tell me so frankly, and at once, I shall not cease to respect you, nor to love you." (His voice trembled as he said these last words.) "I shall leave you for a time; you must soon, you will soon, conquer these feelings; and then — perhaps — only tell me the truth, Ellen — the only thing that could destroy my love would be, if you ever had, if you ever could, deceive me."

"You cannot love me; it is vain to talk of love to *me!*" I exclaimed, "I have told you so; I cannot be your wife; why do you ask me anything else? Leave me! for God's sake leave me! I am miserable enough as it is."

"Ellen! Ellen! with such feelings as these, how could you speak to me of Henry and of his marriage as you did?"

"Henry! I am not thinking of Henry; I am not talking of *Henry;* I do not care for him; I do not love him, I never did. I *should not be* so wretched, perhaps, if I had."

Edward remained silent for a moment, and then said, with a deep sigh —

"Would to God, Ellen, that there was *truth* in you! It is equally difficult to believe and to disbelieve you."

"Think not of me; leave me, Edward, leave me. I *have* told you the truth. I do not care for Henry; I solemnly protest to you that I do not; but I cannot be your wife — *that* is the truth, too."

"Then why these tears?" said Edward, sternly. "Why all this *acting*? Why cannot you tell me calmly, and at once, that you care not for me, instead of deluding me into the belief that you do, at the very moment when you refuse me."

Suffocated with grief, I hid my face in my hands while he spoke; and said to myself, "*Acting* he calls it! Oh, God! he calls me an *actress!* He says there is no truth in me! How then would he listen to my tale of guilt and of sorrow? How then could he read truth in my broken accents? How could he discern the workings of a proud and wounded spirit?"

I raised my head slowly — Edward was gone; I rushed to the door to call him back, but was met by the servant, who was come to answer the drawing-room bell. My uncle and aunt came into the room at the same time, and I retired to mine, to pass another night betwixt hours of waking misery, and moments of broken and feverish sleep.

At six o'clock in the morning I was woke out of one of these last, by the sound of carriage-wheels. Jumping out of bed, I went to the window, and unclosing the shutter, I saw Edward's carriage rolling away along the avenue, and ours being packed in the court below. I felt glad that we were going too; glad that we were going to London; glad that there was something to think of — to talk of — to do. *Glad!* what a misuse of words. God knows, there was no gladness in my heart that morning, but it was something to be able to forget myself occasionally in the bustle and excitement around me. Mr. and Mrs. Middleton were not aware that anything had passed between Edward and myself. They mentioned him several times in the course of the day, and spoke of *seeing him in London in* three weeks' time.

At seven that evening we arrived in London, where I had not

been for several years before; its immensity, the perpetual noise of carriages, the heaviness of the atmosphere, made me feel in another state of existence, and when giddy with the rapid motion of the carriage, flushed by the sudden transition from the cold night air to the vicinity of a blazing coal fire, I sat down to dinner in the small front dining-room of a house in Brook-street. It was only the uneasiness which I felt at the idea that any moment might bring Henry Lovell into my presence, that made me aware that nothing in myself or in my fate was changed. Really very much fatigued, I begged to go to bed, immediately after dinner, and, for many hours, slept heavily, in oblivion of all I had suffered, and all I feared.

CHAPTER X.

"Some kinds of baseness
Are nobly undergone, and most poor matters
Point to rich ends." SHAKSPEARE.

THE next morning, after breakfast, I asked Mrs. Middleton what were her plans for the day. She told me she had got a note from Henry after I had gone to bed the evening before, to ask her when and where she wished to see him; that she had sent him word to come to her before two o'clock, but that she thought I had better not be present at their first interview. I instantly proposed to her to go to Alice as soon as I could be sure that Henry had left his house, and prepare her for the visit which I knew my aunt intended to make to her in the afternoon, or else to bring her back with me to Brook-street. I felt I had better meet Henry again in her presence than alone. Mrs. Middleton agreed to all this; and I went to my room to wait there for his arrival, which was to be the signal for my departure. In about an hour's time I heard a knock at the house-door, and having ascertained that Henry was with his sister, I got into the carriage, and drove off to — Street.

I remember that accidentally I had in my hands a card of address which my maid had just given me for some shop in Regent-street, with a long list, in small print, at its back, of the various articles to be procured there, and that I read it over and over *again, with* that nervous attention which we give to anything that

will fix our eyes, and the mechanical part of our thoughts, when we are in a state of restless impatience. The carriage stopped at No. 3, in — Street, and I told the servant to inquire if Mrs. Lovell was at home. The door was opened by a man who had been Henry's servant since he went first to Oxford, and who, on seeing me, came up to the carriage, and told me that Mrs. Lovell was in the square; but that if I would walk in, and wait a few minutes, he would go and tell her that I was come.

I followed him up the narrow carpeted stairs; he opened the door of the back drawing-room, and left me there. For a moment I sat down on the nearest chair to subdue the quick beating of my heart. I then looked about me, and examined Alice's room. It was furnished just as most rooms in London are furnished, where no particular care has been taken to superintend their arrangement. There were blue striped sofas and chairs, a large table and a little table, blue and muslin curtains, and that was all. Everything was in the nicest order possible. On the small table which was placed near the window, with a chair before it, were laid, one upon the other, the same Bible and Prayer Book which I had seen in the closet at Bridman; in a bookcase between the chimney and the window were ranged the same books which had stood there on the wooden shelf; on the round table were a few flowers in a glass, and a basket containing some hemming. There was no fire in the chimney, and the room felt rather cold.

After a few minutes had elapsed, the door opened and Alice came in. As she came up to me, her perfect calmness gave me at once that self-possession which I had vainly struggled for beforehand. As I kissed her, and sat down by her side, it felt to me like entering a church on a hot and dusty summer's day; like leaving behind me the glare and the noise of the busy world without; like plunging into those

> "Arched retreats, where passion's thirst is calmed,
> And care's unthankful gloom." *

She was simply dressed in a brown silk gown. As she took off her straw bonnet, and laid it, and a handful of daisies by it, on

* Lyra Apostolica.

the table, she turned to me with one of those grave smiles which were peculiar to her, and said —

"I have longed to see you again. I am so glad you are come. It seemed to me as if the trees would never get their leaves in London; but they are growing at last, and you are come. But you are looking pale. You are not ill, I hope?"

"No; only very tired, Alice. I am unused to London, and the noise stuns and bewilders me. *You* look just as you did a year ago at Bridman."

A slight colour rose in her cheek at the name of Bridman. "I was a child *then*, though an old one, and now —"

As she paused I said, "Now a woman, and a happy one I hope, dear Alice."

She turned her large blue eyes full upon me, something like a sigh rose in her throat, and she only said, in so low a voice that I could hardly catch the sound, "God is everywhere!"

After this answer I did not feel courage to speak to her of Henry, of her own relations, of the circumstances attending her marriage, of anything, in short, that could cause her pain or disturbance, and I therefore asked her how she spent her time in London.

"That will be easily described," she said; "for in London one day exactly resembles another, — in its employment, at least."

"Does it really?" I exclaimed; for this was certainly not my idea of a London life.

"Yes," she replied. "I get up every day at six o'clock; and, after attending to some of my household concerns, I walk to Church, at St. Margaret's, where there is a service every morning. It feels almost like the country to walk at that hour."

"You must have found it piercingly cold in the winter?"

"It was cold enough sometimes; but lately it has been so mild that I walk slowly by the balconies to smell longer the mignonette which fills them. After Church comes breakfast; and then I go to the square."

"To walk there?"

"*Yes;* a kind of a walk."

"Alone?"

"Oh, no; I have plenty of companions — but never mind that, I will tell it you all another time."

"No; tell it me now; it interests me so much."

"It will make you think me a child still, though we said I was a woman just now. Well, then, first there are the birds, — the black, starved, unhappy-looking London birds; you cannot think how pleased they are with the seed and the crumbs which I take them every morning. I have chosen a particular old thorn-tree for our meeting-place; its leaves are beginning now to peep out, and it will be a great day for the birds and me when its white blossoms appear. As it is, they flock to it quick enough when I come into the square, and seem almost to call to me to make haste."

"You love them, Alice, as you used to love your Passion Flower?"

"Not exactly; I loved my Passion Flower because it did *me* good; my birds I love because I do *them* good. But I have greater friends than these in the square; friends that run to me too when I come in — the darling children."

"How do you love *them*, Alice?"

"Oh, as God's own chosen ones, whose Angels behold his face in Heaven. They seem so very *near* Heaven. Will you come some day into the square with me, Miss Middleton?"

"Call me Ellen, and I will go with you wherever you like."

"Well, then, dear Ellen, you must come and see those I love best. There is one so like Johnny!" (her eyes filled with tears as she said this) "only that he looks as if he belonged to some noble race, like those that the verses talk about; and another looks like the picture in my prayer-book of young David going to fight Goliath. I am so happy with them that I sometimes forget myself, and stay longer in the square than I ought."

"Why, what have you to do afterwards?"

"Oh, then, it is time to go to the hospital."

"What do you mean? What hospital?"

"The hospital in — Place. I go there every day for five or six hours."

"*What to do?*"

"Whatever they give me to do."

"I don't understand you, Alice."

"You mean how I got leave to go there? I will tell you; — one of the nurses, sisters they call them now, knew me when we lived at Bromley, and two or three times I had met her in the street, and talked with her. She took me one day with her into the hospital to see a poor woman who had broken her leg; she was in sad distress of mind, and could not bear to be left alone, and, as the sisters had too much to do to sit much by her bed-side, they were glad enough to leave me with her. Ever since, I have gone there almost every day, and they always find something or other for me to do."

"And when you leave the hospital, what do you do?"

"Generally I go to the square again for an hour, and then to evening prayers; but sometimes, if Mr. Henry is at home, he walks with me for a little while."

"And does Mr. Henry," I said with a smile, "approve of your long visits to the hospital, and your walks in the square, and all your solitary proceedings? He must be rather lonely at home all the morning without you?"

"He gets up late," answered Alice, "and always goes out immediately after breakfast."

"And then at dinner, or in the evening, I suppose, you give him an account of the proceedings of the day?"

"No, Mr. Henry does not care for birds and flowers, or children. He is very kind to poor people; twice, when I have asked him, he has given me some money for them, but he does not like to hear about them."

"Mrs. Middleton wishes very much to see you to-day, Alice."

"Does she? I shall be so glad to see her. When may I go to her? Is she like Mr. Henry?"

"In some ways she is, but you will find that she does care for birds and flowers" (I was going to add children, but something at my heart stopped me). "Come, dear Alice, put on your bonnet, and we will go to her immediately if you will come with me."

While she was tying on her bonnet, I went up to the book-

case, and, looking over it said, "I do not see any new books here. I should have thought you would have added to your stock in London?"

"Mr. Henry has plenty of books in his study," answered Alice; "and when I was first married, as he had given me leave to take them when I liked, I read some of them."

"And liked them?"

"Some not enough — some too much."

When we were in the carriage I asked Alice which of the books that she had read she liked too much.

"Some books of verses," she answered. "I do love verses so much. They give me the same sort of feeling as a fine day, or like the birds when they sing more sweetly than usual, or when in a storm the thunder is very loud."

"Whose poems are you speaking of?"

"Lord Byron's; and as I read them, I felt all this more than I had ever done before, and it was very pleasant. He writes such beautiful things about the sky and the fields, and the country and children, that it made me quite happy to read them and think about them. But then I found that he wrote too of terrible and wicked things, things that made one tremble and shudder to think of, so I put that book away, and read it no more."

"And what did you try next?"

"Some long stories written by Sir Walter Scott."

"You must have liked them?"

"Yes, indeed I did; they are full of good and right things; and I spent many pleasant hours in reading them. But then, Ellen, somehow they made me think too much. They gave me thoughts that were not wrong perhaps, but which were not good for me. Thoughts that did not help to make me, what St. Paul says we ought to be, 'content with that state of life in which God has put us.'"

"So then you left off reading altogether?"

"No, I read my own old books again; I picked out verses and stories for the happy children in the square, and hymns and chapters in the Bible for the sick people at the hospital, and all was right again."

As we drove into Brook-street, I told Alice that we were now close to Mrs. Middleton's house; but I did not see in her the least sign of nervousness or agitation at the idea of the approaching interview. I felt calmer myself than I had expected, for it seemed to me that, in her presence, Henry must forget the past; that her husband could not be the Henry I had known, and whom I so much dreaded to meet again; and yet, at the same time, I hardly felt as if she was his wife. As it generally happens when one has speculated much before-hand, on a person's probable conduct and appearance under certain circumstances, Alice, as a wife, though exactly like herself, was quite unlike the various pictures which my imagination had drawn of her during the last few months. At times I had fancied her beaming with happiness, loving and beloved, and in the full enjoyment of those early days of bliss which a young wife so often dreams away in enviable unconsciousness of its transient nature. At other times, and oftener, I had feared that her cheek might be pale, and her spirits broken; that disappointment might have fastened its poisonous fang in her heart; and that I should read in her eyes the fatal secret of an unhappy marriage. But I had found her calm as the surface of a summer sea; and no Virgin Martyr walking with a firm step to the fiery trial: no dying saint closing his eyes in the joyful hope of a certain resurrection, ever seemed more free from earthly passions, earthly cares, or earthly hopes, than the beautiful bride of eighteen who sat by my side.

When we entered the drawing-room in Brook-street, Henry was sitting by his sister. She got up hastily, came up to Alice, and kissing her affectionately, drew her to a couch at the end of the room, and entered into conversation with her, in that kind and eager manner which was peculiar to her. Henry made a step towards them, and then turned back; and, holding out his hand to me, said in a low voice, "You are very kind to her, and so you ought to be."

I returned the pressure of his hand, and answered in the same tone, "Who in the world could be otherwise than kind to her?"

"Poor Alice!" he said, and drew his hand across his brow, *as if in pain.*

He was pale, and he had grown very thin since I last had seen him. He drew me to the furthest window by some insignificant question, and then told me that his father was expected in town the next day; and now that his sister had seen Alice, he supposed that he would do so too.

"I am glad, very glad of it, Henry; I am not sure if *he* will appreciate her thoroughly; but I know *she* will," I said looking at Mrs. Middleton.

"She will do her harm," he muttered.

"Harm!"

"Yes, as she has done *you* harm."

"What harm has she ever done me?"

"Made you what you are, — too good to be bad, and ..."

"Too bad to be good? True; but that has not been *her* doing."

"Has it not?" he retorted, and fixed his eyes upon me, as if he would have read into my soul.

After a pause, he said, glancing at Alice, "Take care what you do with *her*. She lives in a dream; and if you show her but once life as it is — as it ought to have been for her, — she will wake, break her heart, if she has one, or that of some one else, if she has not."

I could hardly command myself sufficiently to speak; but, laying my head against the window pane, and without looking at him, I said in a low voice, "Surely, Henry, you try to make her happy — you *must* feel affection for her?"

"Enough to wish, with all my soul, that I had never set eyes on her, or on you. — Don't go — don't stir from where you are. Once for all, hear it — you *must* listen to whatever I may choose to say to you. Once you would not believe me, when I told you that, by your obstinacy, you would sacrifice the happiness of three persons. You have done it; for mine" (he said this with a bitter laugh) "and your own and hers hang upon a thread. If you think to brave me, do so; go away now, and never speak to me again; but then, by Heaven, the thread snaps; and you will believe me this time, I hope!"

I did not stir; and that mute ackowledgment of Henry's

cret power, which my soul rebelled against, but dared not defy, humbled me more bitterly than anything I had yet gone through.

After a few minutes of this speaking silence, — for, alas! how much the compliance of that hour revealed, — he himself walked away, joined his sister and his wife; and, after a few moments' conversation, he took his leave, and Alice went home in our carriage.

It was settled before they went, that on the next day they should dine in Brook-street; and Mrs. Middleton told me afterwards that she had arranged with Henry to use her best endeavours to persuade Mr. Lovell to meet them. He had charged her not to say before Alice, that there would be any difficulty in obtaining this, as she had not the slightest idea that their marriage had been disapproved of by his family.

"Nothing seems to me so useless," added Mr. Middleton, "as to reproach, to remonstrate, or even to wonder, over an act which is past recall; but it is impossible to see Henry look so miserable, to hear him speak so coldly of that beautiful young wife of his, and at the same time conceal from her with nervous anxiety that it was a step which nothing but the most violent passion could justify, without feeling bewildered at the strangeness of the whole affair."

"What has he said to you, Ellen? and what impression has your visit to her left upon your mind?"

"I think," was my answer, "what I always have thought of her; that she is more like an angel, in spirit as well as in face, than any other human being I ever saw; she seems happy, but it is hardly the happiness of this world which she seems to enjoy; but, whether it is that of the saint who has built upon a rock, or that of a child which a breath can destroy, I hardly know."

"I felt," said Mrs. Middleton, "while I was talking to her, as if she hardly belonged to this world. Do you know, Ellen," she continued, with a smile, "I *could* not have asked her if she was in love with Henry. I should have feared to see her vanish away like that beautiful apparition in the German Legend, which dissolved into air, if a word of mortal love reached her ears. But *this is all nonsense*," she said with a sigh, "I hope they are

happy; yet, after having looked forward so much to seeing them, I now have a more vague feeling of discomfort about them than I had before."

My uncle came in just then; and I was glad to leave the room, and thus escape a repetition of the question which I had left unanswered with respect to Henry's conversation with me.

CHAPTER XI.

"I do not love her, nor will strive to do it." — SHAKSPEARE.

WHAT course was I to pursue? Should I take the first opportunity that would offer of approaching Henry, and, by charging him solemnly to tell me at once the meaning of his hints and threats, relieve myself from the tormenting uncertainty under which I suffered, and obtain from him some promise which would, comparatively at least, set my mind at ease? These questions I asked myself over and over again during the rest of that day and the succeeding night, till, towards morning, I fell asleep without having come to any decision. Day after day passed on, and still no explanation occurred between us. The projected dinner had taken place; Mr. Middleton and Mr. Lovell had both been captivated and touched by the beauty, simplicity, and sweetness of Alice's face and manner. They seemed instinctively to feel that there was something holy about her, — something that forbade one to doubt or distrust her, had appearances been even twenty times more against her than they were; and both were now still more indignant with Henry for the coldness and indifference with which he seemed to regard her, than they had previously been at his marriage. I admired Alice from the bottom of my soul; she was, to me, the very type of purity, — the ideal of perfection; but I did not seek her much. Obliged to see Henry often at home, I shrank from going to his house; and her life was so full of holy duties; the tone of her mind, the character of her conversation, breathed a spirit of such earnest faith, of such religious peace, that after a while my troubled spirit chafed in the presence of what formed *such a contrast to its* own restless waywardness. When bewildered

with passion — when lost in the mazes of sin and error, we may feel repose for an instant in prostrating ourselves at the foot of the cross; we may wander into a church, and for a moment cool our burning foreheads against the cold marble; but the deep silence of the sanctuary soon grows oppressive.

"There 's a tone in its voice which we fain would shun,
For it asks what the secret soul has done." *

Thus it was with me with respect to Alice; and other causes also contributed to the same effect. Henry was often in Brook-street, but she seldom came. Either he discouraged a frequent intercourse between us, and threw impediments in its way, which effectually checked it, or else it never occurred to Alice herself to interrupt the uniform course of her daily employments and pursuits, in order to accommodate herself to our totally different mode of life.

We had begun going out a great deal in society, and Mrs. Middleton proposed to Henry that Alice should do so too, and offered to take her with us wherever we went; but he declined this offer in the most positive manner; and when his sister almost indignantly pressed him to explain his refusal, he said that Alice had peculiar notions on the subject which he did not wish to thwart.

"But we could persuade her out of those notions," persisted Mrs. Middleton; "for surely it is a great pity for you and for herself that she should remain a stranger to your friends and acquaintances, while you associate with them as much as before your marriage."

"It may be a pity, Mary," was his impatient answer, "but it is inevitable, and you only torment me by urging me on the subject."

Mrs. Middleton, who was not easily *put down*, after vainly remonstrating with him upon it, entered on the question with Alice one morning that we were calling upon her, and tried to explain to her that for her husband's sake she should endeavour to make friends with his friends, and to go where he went.

* From "The Revellers," by Mrs. Hemans.

Alice looked at her with surprise, and assured her that she was perfectly ready to make acquaintance with any of Henry's friends, or to comply with any request of his.

"Then, my dear child," replied Mrs. Middleton, "why does your husband object to your going out with us of an evening? You ought not to shut yourself up; — you should endeavour to assimilate your tastes to his."

"I do not know what his tastes are," said Alice, "nor where he is while I am at home."

"He is," said Mrs. Middleton, "among his friends and his acquaintance. He is where I want to take you, — where he will see you amused and admired, and love you all the better for it."

"Not for going against his wishes?" said Alice, gently.

"He *must* have misunderstood you, my dear child."

"No, he has *not*," she answered with firmness; the colour in her cheek was slightly heightened; and after a pause she said earnestly—"I think I understand you now, dear Mrs. Middleton, and I feel your kindness; but do not urge me on this subject: you would give me more pain than pleasure, and do me more harm than good."

She rose suddenly, went to the table, and took from it a bunch of violets, which she gave me. When she sat down again, her face was as calm as usual.

On our way home, Mrs. Middleton seemed absorbed in thought; and her manner to Henry, whom we found waiting for us in Brook-street, was unusually cold.

Whenever we went into society we met him, and he still contrived never to lose sight of me; and by looks, by words quickly uttered, by sudden changes of tone and manner, to convey to me the knowledge of his secret feelings. The tone of those feelings, and his mode of conversation, varied from day to day. Sometimes he was moody and almost savage in his manner, and every word he uttered bordered on a threat. At other times he seemed only anxious to re-establish between us a footing of confidence and intimacy. On one of these occasions, I met him at a ball at Lady *Wyndham's*, my Dorsetshire acquaintance. I had been *dancing with him*, and afterwards had walked into a room which

was cool, compared with those that preceded it. Several people were standing about a round table covered with prints, albums, and caricatures. We sat down on a small couch by the window; and after some trifling conversation, in which he incidentally named his wife, I told him that I could not understand his line of conduct with regard to her. "I am not speaking, now, of your feelings or your affections," I added hastily; "although God knows there would be enough to wonder over on that score; but of your way of going on as a married man. There may be excuses for what is involuntary in our feelings, but surely none for determined and systematic neglect."

"Neglect," he replied, "is a word easily uttered; but could you as easily prescribe to me a line of conduct to follow?"

"Of that, your conscience, if you have one," I answered impatiently, "ought to inform you."

"Would you wish me," he returned with a sneer, "to feed birds in the square half the day, and nurse sick people during the other half? Shall I learn to make lint and choose baby-clothes?"

"Oh no!" I exclaimed; "I never supposed for a single instant that you could equal Alice, or do, in all your life, the good that she does in one day; but if you showed her confidence and kindness, — if you treated her as she ought to be treated....."

"She would love me, — which she does not now!"

"I am persuaded she does."

"No she does *not*," he answered, with some vehemence. "I do not call that *love* which never made the voice tremble, or the heart beat. *Is* that love which never betrays itself by emotion, Ellen? Can *love* leave the soul calm, and the spirits unruffled?"

"Not yours — not mine, perhaps, Henry; but oh, let us not judge purer and higher natures than ours, by the tests of our own wayward and ill-governed minds. Indeed — indeed, Alice loves you."

"She loves me as she loves her grandmother, her brother Johnny, and half the children and the beggars in the square. You must excuse me if that is not my notion of *love*. Do not look so indignantly at me, Ellen; I speak bitterly, but it is not against *her that I am* bitter. I would give all I possess at this moment

that I could set her free, and send her out into life once more, unshackled by hateful ties, and at liberty to choose another destiny. But the die is cast; and she and I must drag on existence together through the dreary journey of life."

"But, Henry — dear Henry," I exclaimed, "why will you not try to gain her love? If you do not think she loves you *now*, she might — she would, if you sought it."

"And if she did? If that calm nature was roused into something like feeling; if a spark of passion lighted on that frozen surface; if, following my sister's blind advice, I sent out that ignorant child into the world and society, to learn what it is to love and to be loved; to hear that she is beautiful; to be told that her husband ought to live in the light of her eyes; ought to carry her in his heart, and prize each hair of her head as a treasure of countless price. If she was to be told all this, and then at home find his eyes averted, his voice cold, his spirits gone, and the sight of her beauty as much lost upon him as if he had been born blind; could she bear this, Ellen? Do you think she could? Would she not curse the day of her birth, and the day of her marriage? Would she not perhaps enter upon a course which would end in shame and misery; or if her religion kept her from that, would she not return to her poor people, to her flowers and her birds, with a breaking heart and a wounded spirit? You are crying, Ellen? Do not cry for *her;* she is calm and happy now, and I pray God she may long remain so; but if you are grieving for me — if you have ever felt the least affection for me, then cry on; for God only knows how miserable I am!"

My tears were indeed falling fast; and it was with a voice, hardly articulate, that I addressed to Henry the question which for so many days had trembled on my lips, and never yet found utterance.

"Why did you marry her?"

He looked at me steadily for a few moments', and then said,

"Ellen, the day will come when I shall answer that question — and *another*, which you wish to ask — but cannot find words or courage for. *There is* much that we must say to each other — *something, perhaps*, that we may do for each other; but then

there must be no reserve, no coldness, no false pride, or affected prudery in our intercourse. You must trust me completely, as I will trust you; we have both of us secrets which have weighed upon our souls, and made silence and solitude dreadful to us. Judge then what I have suffered! Ellen, I will tell you *my* secret—I know *yours*."

"Hush, hush!" I exclaimed wildly, and looked about me with terror, but I saw we were alone; the people who were in the room when we had entered it had all gradually withdrawn, and the sound of music and of voices reached us faintly, where we sat. I covered my face with my hands and murmured, "Speak on."

"Ellen," continued Henry, "Ellen, I have threatened, I have tormented, I have tortured you; but each time I have done so I have writhed myself under the sense of what I was doing; and when you know *all*—when you know under what constraints, with what hopes, with what fears, I have acted—"

He stopped suddenly short; I raised my head abruptly, and in the door-way before us stood Sir Charles Wyndham and Edward Middleton. Never in my life did I act from a more sudden impulse than at that moment. I started forward, and in one minute was at Edward's side. My cheeks were flushed, and my eyes swelled with crying. I pushed by Sir Charles, and seizing on Edward's arm, I whispered to him, "Take me where I can speak to you—don't judge me—don't condemn me."

He did not say a single word, but gave me his arm, and walked with me through all the crowded rooms to the one where Mrs. Middleton was sitting. He almost thrust me into a chair by her side, and disappeared without one word or look.

After an hour of talking and dancing, both of which it seemed to me that I accomplished by some mechanical power, I prevailed on Mrs. Middleton to go home. While we were looking for our cloaks in the ante-room, Henry joined us again. He was holding mine, when Edward rapidly approached us, and in a quiet but imperious manner took it from him, and put it on me himself; on which Sir Charles Wyndham remarked, "That 's right, Mr. Middleton—you should never allow married men to play the gallants *with young* ladies." I do not know if any of us smiled at that

observation. If there was a smile, it must have been a strange one.

As we were driving home, after a few moments of silence, I asked Mrs. Middleton if she had been aware that Edward was arrived in London.

"We expected him in a day or two," she answered; "but I believe he came up to town to-day, only to return into the country to-morrow."

"Has he seen my uncle?" I inquired.

"No," she replied; "he breakfasts with us to-morrow."

There was joy in *that* as far as it went, though what I was to say to him, and how I was to explain the state of emotion in which he had found me that evening when alone with Henry, was more than I could devise, and, as usual, before the moment arrived, I had come to the conclusion that to say *nothing* was the safest course to pursue.

When, at eleven o'clock the next day, I came into the breakfast-room, Edward was just arrived. He shook hands with me kindly; but his countenance was still more grave than usual.

As I was pouring out some tea, my hand trembled — Mrs. Middleton observed it, and said with a smile, "The effects of dissipation, Ellen. We really must pull up, or we shall have you regularly *nervous*."

"How did you like your ball last night, Ellen?" asked Mr. Middleton.

"Not at all," I answered, and felt my cheeks grow crimson.

"Edward," said Mrs. Middleton, "you renewed your acquaintance with Mrs. Ernsley last night; did you not?"

"Yes, I had not seen her since my return."

As he said these insignificant words, he sighed deeply. I could not help instantly connecting in my mind this sigh of his with something which I fancied Mrs. Ernsley might have told him of, that had fallen under her observation at Brandon; and I said in a tone of irritation, "I know nobody whom I would not talk to rather than to Mrs. Ernsley. She invariably takes a wrong view of people and of things."

Edward looked at me steadily, and again I felt my cheeks

flushing; and, in my embarrassment, I exclaimed that the fire was very hot, and got up to place a screen before it. He helped me to carry it, and said in a whisper as he did so, "Do not be ashamed of blushing; there is *truth* in *that* at least." After this, I did not open my lips again while breakfast lasted.

When my aunt had left the room, and my uncle was completely engrossed by the newspaper, Edward walked to the chimney, leant his back against it, and, taking hold of my gloves, which were lying on the slab, he twisted them in his hand; and then, as by a sudden effort, said, "Ellen, come here."

I obeyed, and in a voice which I felt was humble, though it tried to be careless and gay, I said — "Give me back my gloves, Edward; you are spoiling them."

He detained them an instant, as I took hold of them, and said half sternly, half tenderly — "Have you nothing to say to me? I thought last night —"

"Oh, last night, I was quite beside myself," I interrupted, with a nervous attempt at a laugh. "I talked nonsense to everybody, and you must not call me to account for what I may have said or done."

"I am afraid not," he answered coldly; and, taking up a newspaper, he sat down again at the table.

I remained standing where he had left me, with my eyes fixed upon him, vainly endeavouring to find out some means of appeasing him. Nothing but openness and frankness could reinstate me in his favour: and how *could* I be open and frank? What *could* I tell him that would justify my intimacy with Henry? or account for the agitation which his words had caused me? Nothing; nothing short of the *truth;* and *that* — oh! how wearied I was with that eternal combat with myself — with that everlasting question, so often asked, and so often answered by my own mind. I absolutely shrunk from discussing it with myself again.

I walked impatiently up and down the room, and when Mrs. Middleton came in with a note in her hand, which she gave me to read, I felt glad of anything which would break the course of these harassing thoughts. The note was from Henry, to tell his sister that Alice was poorly, and would be glad to see herself or me.

"Shall you go?" I asked.

"Will you, my love?" she answered. "I expect my father at twelve, and your visit will, I have no doubt, be more acceptable to Alice than mine."

"Is the carriage at the door?" I inquired; and, having ascertained that it was, I ran up-stairs to put on my bonnet.

On my way down, I opened the door of the breakfast-room, to see if Edward was gone. He was alone; and as I came in, he said, "Are you going to see Mrs. Lovell?"

"Yes; she is not well, I hear, and wishes to see me."

"Do you like her as much as you once told me that you did?"

"I do like her, and admire her, as you would too, if you knew her. Oh, how you would approve of her! she is so unlike me!" I added, with a deep sigh.

Edward coloured, and said, "Is she happy with Henry?"

"I do not exactly know if she is happy with him; happy at least in the sense which I attach to the word; but I do know that I ardently wish her to be so, and there is truth in *this*, Edward."

"I believe you," he answered, and held out his hand to me; "I believe you in spite of myself." He hesitated, and seemed to wish to say something more, but just at that moment my uncle called him from the next room; again pressing my hand, he took leave of me, and I got into the carriage, and drove off to — street.

CHAPTER XII.

When I behold a genius bright and base,
Of towering talents, and terrestrial aims,
Methinks I see, as thrown from her high sphere,
The glorious fragments of a soul immortal
With rubbish mixed, and glittering in the dust.
YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS.

WHEN I arrived, and was shown into the drawing-room, I found, for the first time, Alice and Henry sitting together; she was looking very pale, and her head was resting on her hand; but when I came in, she smiled, and asked me to sit by her. She said *her head ached* very much, but that it did not signify; it *would be better soon.*

I advised her not to keep near her a large nosegay of lilacs and seringa, the odour of which was overpowering.

"I do not think they hurt me," she said; "and it was so kind of *him*" (looking at Henry) "to get them for me this morning, that it is a pleasure to look at them."

He coloured slightly, as she said this; and taking the jug in which they were, he carried it to the open window.

"I was not aware that they were bad for you, Alice," he said; "but if they are, you must keep them at a distance."

"She is really very unwell," he continued, turning to me; "she has overtired herself completely. Ellen, you must persuade her to give up going to that horrid hospital; she stayed there so many hours yesterday, that it has brought on this feverish attack. The doctor saw her this morning, and says that it comes from nervous exhaustion. You will give it up, Alice; won't you?"

"If you wish it," she answered, in a tone of voice which had a note of sadness in it.

"She stayed there till twelve o'clock last night," (he whispered to me; and there was some emotion in *his* voice;) "in a little close room, with a dying woman."

"While we were at the ball," I thought to myself; and taking Alice's hand, I kissed it with a feeling like remorse; though, God knows, I had not wronged her, in word or in thought.

After a few minutes, during which she made a few languid attempts at conversation, her head sunk back on the pillow of the couch, and she fell asleep. Her hands were joined together, and supported her cheek; the transparent paleness of her complexion made her delicately-chiselled features appear as if they were carved out of the purest marble, and in that attitude of perfect repose she looked more beautiful than I had ever yet seen her.

Henry and I sat silently for some time, by the side of her couch. When her regular breathing and her divided lips showed that she had fallen into a deep slumber, he got up and partly closed the shutters; then opening the door of the back sitting-room, he beckoned to me to follow him. I did so; but, putting on my bonnet and shawl at the same time, I prepared to go away *immediately*.

On which he said to me in a low voice, "Now, Ellen, for once I can speak to you alone, and without interruption, and you *must* listen to me."

I answered in the same tone, but with the most determined accent, "This tyranny is intolerable, and I cannot submit to it; if, as you have often hinted to me, you have the power and the will to make me miserable, — to destroy the small remnant of happiness which I can ever enjoy, — do so! I am at your mercy."

"At *my* mercy!" he exclaimed, "at *my* mercy! Ellen, the time is come when everything must be revealed to you, when there must be no secrets between us; and all I implore is, that you will hear me. It is of the utmost importance to you, even more than for me, that you should do so. I saw by your manner yesterday, and by Edward Middleton's also, that subjects of such vital importance as those we have to discuss together cannot be carried on in common conversation, without conveying an impression which might be injurious to your reputation; and you cannot imagine how much this idea has tormented me. Your peace of mind, your reputation, Ellen, are dearer to me than life itself; and such love as mine cannot be selfish —"

"Henry, Henry, your very words belie you. I am indeed fallen low in your eyes, since you, the husband of another, dare to speak of love to me."

"Not of such love as mine. You do not think, Ellen, you cannot believe that I am such a wretch as here, in my own house, with my wife ill in that next room, to speak to you of my love with any object but that of proving to you, that to the uttermost of my power I will guard you from the evils which hang over your head. Be calm, Ellen; be reasonable, I implore you (he continued, as I wrung my hands, and then clasped them in an attitude of despair;) Alice did not close her eyes last night. After undergoing great fatigue, she is now fallen asleep, and will probably slumber on for some hours. We may never have another such opportunity of speaking without restraint or interruption; and nothing can seem more natural than that you should remain here, and be ready to *comfort and amuse her* when she does wake."

"*Deceit! deceit!* everlasting deceit!" I exclaimed, as I sunk

down on a chair which he had placed for me near the window. "How my soul loathes it, how I hate and despise myself!"

"But will it not be some comfort to you, Ellen, to open your heart to me? Have I not been a friend to you? You see how guarded I am — how careful to choose words that can neither shock nor offend you. Show me confidence, show me kindness, and you can obtain from me every effort that a man can make, every sacrifice which a woman can require from one whose whole soul is bound up in her, whose existence is but one long dream of her..... But this is not what I meant to say," he exclaimed, abruptly, and getting up, he walked up and down the room, and passed his hand over his eyes: then sitting down again, he said, "I had better begin by giving you an account of the circumstances of my life, which will explain the difficulties I have been entangled in, the sufferings I have endured, aggravated by remorse, and by the consciousness that I had brought them on myself."

"Have *you* suffered in this way, Henry? Oh, then, speak on, for I shall understand you, I shall feel for you though no one else in the world should."

"I know it, Ellen; I am persuaded of it. Circumstances have raised a barrier between us, which ought never to have existed; but there must always be a bond of sympathy in our feelings which nothing ever can or will annihilate. Do you remember that when I left college I went to Elmsley, and spent three or four weeks there?"

"Yes, I do: it was then that you and Edward began to treat me as a grown up woman, and that we took those long walks in the country which first made me feel intimate with you both."

"It was," he resumed; "and those days were the last that I ever spent free from care and anxiety. I sometimes look back to them and live them over again in thought, till I long to blot out from my life and my memory all that has intervened between that time and this. But the one is not more impossible than the other," he added with a sigh, and for a moment leant his face on his hand, and remained silent. "Well," he resumed after a pause, "I *left Elmsley, and* went to London; there I immediately plunged *into the wildest* dissipation, and led a life, the details of which I

am ashamed to describe in speaking to you. With an income scarcely sufficient to enable me to live as a gentleman, I indulged in every species of extravagance and lavish expenditure; but, above all, my passion for gambling was at that time such, that it seemed to me as if life was not worth having, without the means of gratifying it. For weeks I lived in a state of continual fever; my nights were turned into days; and, during the few hours of sleep — but not of repose — which gave me strength to return to the gaming-table, the rattling of the dice and the shuffling of the cards haunted me in my dreams, with alternations of exultation and despair, as vivid though not as distinct, as in my waking hours. At first, (the old history of all such cases,) I won immensely, and this encouraged me to play higher and higher stakes, which, when the tide of fortune turned, involved me, almost before I was conscious of it, in debts of honour, far exceeding in amount what I could even contemplate ever having the power to discharge. Still I played on; a gleam of success now and then giving me a feverish hope that I might regain at least a part of what I had lost. I played on till the case grew so desperate, that I dared no longer look it in the face; and I lived under a sort of perpetual night-mare.

"As long as I had any money left, I paid what I lost; then I ran into debt to the masters of the different clubs, and borrowed money of such of my acquaintance as were kind or imprudent enough to lend it. To others I lost large sums on credit, under promises to pay them on a future day. When the day arrived and found me unable to meet my engagements, I was induced to give bills to my creditors for other and distant days. Again those days came, and again they found me insolvent. I will not, I need not, go through all the miserable details of the difficulties in which I was entangled, of the humiliating excuses I had to make, and the more humiliating threats and reproaches I had to endure. It is enough to say that, with desperate infatuation, I made a solemn promise to my creditors to satisfy them all on the first day of the ensuing month, and on the fulfilment of that promise it depended, whether my character as a gentleman was still preserved or irretrievably lost. *Ellen, I cannot* attempt to describe to you what I *suffered at that time.* The wrestling with an impossibility, the

struggle after what was unattainable, the incapability of resigning myself to what seemed inevitable, the powerless rage, the smarting pride, the agonised self-reproach; it was dreadful, and no one to speak to, or turn to . . . ."

"And why, in the name of Heaven, why did you not appeal to my uncle? Why did you not speak to Edward Middleton?"

An expression of sudden pain and a burning flush spread over Henry's countenance at this question. After a moment's hesitation he said, "I must tell you *all*, though to tell you *this* gives me a pang which would almost atone for any degree of guilt. You must know, then, that it was at Oxford that I acquired a taste for gambling, and that there, I ran in some measure the same course of imprudence, and went through the same suffering that I have just described to you, except that the sums which I lost amounted to hundreds instead of thousands. Edward, at that time, observed that something weighed on my spirits, and easily drew from me a confession of my folly, and my embarrassments. After lecturing me for some days on the subject, he brought me a draught for the amount of what I had lost, which he had obtained for me from Mr. Middleton, but only on the condition that I would give them both my most solemn word of honour that I would never play again. Mr. Middleton's letter was not only stern, it was also contemptuous; and had I then been able to devise any mode of extricating myself from my difficulties, I would have refused the money and the promise exacted from me; but it was vain to seek for any such; and with feelings more wounded than grateful, I gave the promise required. *How* I kept it, you have seen; and now you can understand that I would sooner have fled to America, and never shown my face in England again, than have turned to Mr. Middleton for aid or assistance. To my father it would have been useless to apply; he has, as you know, no income but what he derives from the Navy Pay Office —"

Here Henry paused, and drew a long breath as if to gain courage to proceed. He went to the door of the next room to ascertain if Alice was still fast asleep; and, having done so, he again sat down by my side, and went on with his history: —

"*At about six o'clock* on the day on which I had pledged my-

self to pay my debts, after several hours of weary pacing up and down the dusty and sultry streets, in which I had met with several acquaintances, who had turned their heads away when they saw me coming, I walked into my father's office and found him dressed for dinner, with his hat and his gloves in his hand, and a strong expression of impatience in his countenance.

"'Oh, how-do-you-do, Henry, my boy,' he said as I came in. 'Do you know, my dear fellow, you could do me a great kindness. I had appointed the chief clerk to be here at half-past six upon business, quite forgetting that I was engaged to dine and sleep at Percy Cross. Now, if you have nothing particular to do and could wait for him here, I should still be in time for dinner.'

"'But what is the business to be done?' I asked, and threw myself at full length on one of the benches of the office. 'Am I competent to perform it?'

"'It only consists in unlocking that drawer,' he replied, 'and putting into his hands bank-notes to the amount of £5,000, which are wanted for some payments to be made to-morrow morning. There is nobody here at this moment with whom I should like to leave this key; but if you can stay —'

"'Oh I can stay; I have nothing to do.'

"I held out my hand for the key, put it in my pocket, wished my father good-night, and returned to my pleasant meditations. I had been alone for about a quarter of an hour, when the porter of the office came in and told me, as he handed me a card, that a gentleman was without and wished to speak to me. As I glanced at the name on the card, a disagreeable sort of feeling came over me; and as I desired the porter to show the gentleman into my father's private room, and followed him there, I mentally resolved to pick a quarrel with this individual, and to give him an opportunity of blowing my brains out — about the best thing that could happen to me, as I thought, at that moment.

"Mr. Escourt, the person in question, had been one of my intimates on my first arrival in London, and more than any one else had encouraged me in every species of extravagance, and especially in my passion for gambling. Often, when I was on the *point of checking myself in* the insane course I was pursuing, he

had urged me on by a few dexterous words, and laughed at those fears which the desperate condition of my affairs suggested. Latterly he had won from me large sums of money; and I now owed him between three and four thousand pounds. He had always kept on good terms with me; but I had reason to know that he was one of those who had been most active in circulating reports against my character; and that he had secretly, and in the unfairest manner, used his influence with my other creditors to deter them from granting me any further indulgence. Possessed with this idea, I walked into the room where he was waiting. I cannot exactly describe to you what passed between us; that it drove me mad for the time is all I can say. He did not utter one word for which I could personally call him to account; he even maintained the character of my friend throughout; but he contrived at the same time to wound, insult, and exasperate me into a state bordering on frenzy. He informed me that, in spite of his efforts to prevent it, my creditors had come to the resolution of taking no more excuses; and if their claims were not satisfied on that very day, to make my conduct known to the world, and to take such measures as should lead to my expulsion from the clubs of which I was a member. He ended by expressing his pity for me, and his willingness, as far as his own case went, to forego all claim for what I owed him. How can I describe to you the insulting sneer that pierced through the hypocritical sympathy of his countenance? How shall I tell you — how will you understand — what passed through me in that moment? I drew up haughtily; I desired him to spare his pity, to reserve his forbearance for another occasion; that if he would wait five minutes I would satisfy him that his *friends* had been over-hasty in their conclusions; and that, having so satisfied him, I hoped he would take the opportunity of stating to them that very evening, that, as far as his case was concerned, there was nothing to complain of in my conduct as a *man of honour*. I said all this in a calmer tone than I now repeat it to you, and I walked out of the room with a steady step. Do you guess where I went? I went to the drawer in the office, unlocked it, counted out the money that I wanted, *£3,500, and said* to myself while I did it, 'At twelve o'clock to-

night I shall shoot myself.' I locked the drawer again, put the key in my pocket, went back to Escourt, and handed to him the bank-notes. He bowed, offered to shake hands with me, hoped I did full justice to his good intentions, would make a point of stating at — 's that very evening what had passed between us, and walked away. I walked away too; but, as I was opening the door of the office to take away my hat and stick, I met Harding, who I must tell you (if you do not know it already) is a half-brother of Mrs. Tracy, and consequently *her* uncle," he said, pointing to the next room. "He bowed, and told me that, having met my father in Piccadilly, who had stopped in his gig to inform him I was waiting at the office for him, he had come on as fast as he could in case I was in a hurry. I looked at him in a strange manner I suppose, for he seemed puzzled and said, 'I 'm afraid you are not well, Sir.'

"'Not very well,' I stammered out, and walked towards the door.

"He followed me and said, 'I had understood Mr. Lovell to say, Sir, that he had left with you the key of — — —'

"'Oh, the key, — yes, I have the key at my lodgings; my father called on me, and left it there. Can you come and fetch it to-morrow morning?'

"'Why, Sir, if it suited you as well,' he began.

"'I am not going home at present, and as it comes to the same —' I rejoined.

"'I must come early then, Sir?'

"'As early as you please,' I said, and walked into the street, where the air appeared to me to have grown ten times more sultry than it was an hour before. The pavement seemed literally to burn under my feet; and the sky had that heavy leaden look, 'dark as if the day of doom hung o'er Nature's shrinking head;' which produces a feeling of intolerable oppression. When I reached my lodgings it was beginning to rain. I threw open the window of my room, and then flung myself on my bed in a state which baffles all description. The prisoner in Newgate, who has just had his sentence read to him, *cannot* feel himself more inevitably *condemned to death than I did* at that moment. If before the next

morning I did not destroy myself, I was nothing but a common thief. I knew that the only circumstance which distinguished the act I had committed from other crimes of the same sort, was, that detection was so inevitable, the evidence against me so indisputable, that it could only have been the act of a man who had made up his mind to die.

"I was to die, then, and by my own hand. Ellen, I do not believe that I am a coward; I know I am not, and yet I trembled dreadfully when death, real, actual, bloody death, stood before me in unavoidable, almost tangible, shape; a deadly sickness crept over my heart, and such a feebleness into my limbs, that a worse terror seized me lest I should faint and not recover till the moment when Harding should arrive; that perhaps I should not have strength to load and discharge the pistol; then a horrible vision passed before me of arrest, trial, execution; of scenes to which all that had tortured me some hours ago seemed but as child's play. I started wildly from my bed, and flung my arms about to prove to myself that I had yet life and strength enough to kill myself. A racking pain shot across my head; I ground my teeth, and then I felt a sudden impulse to laugh and to make mouths, which felt very like going mad. I saw a bottle of laudanum on the chimney-piece, and seized hold of it with desperate eagerness; had it been full, I should have drunk every drop in it; but as it was, there was only a small quantity, which quieted me. I sat down by the window shivering with cold. The heavy rain was driven in by sudden gusts of wind, and I remained there till gradually, as the night grew darker and the sedative began to take effect, I sunk into a heavy, stupid kind of calmness. I started when the clock struck ten; and, groping about the room, I found the match-box and struck a light. I then went to my bureau; and, taking out of the drawer my pistol-case, I placed it on the table, and then sat down to write a few lines to my father. I gave him a short and tolerably coherent account of what I had done, and begged him to avert inquiry until he had procured the means of replacing the sum I had taken. Mr. Middleton will not refuse (I added) to save my name from public disgrace; for Mary's sake —

"*When I* wrote that last sentence — when I came to my sister's

name, I threw down the pen, and gave myself up for a few minutes to a burst of grief, in which I forgot everything but the misery I was going to bring upon her. As I was searching a drawer for some sealing-wax, my hand touched a book which had lain there for many a day unopened. It was a small New Testament, which she had given me before I went to Oxford. I must hurry on with my story, Ellen, or I would tell you how this accidental circumstance gave a new turn to my thoughts; how I suddenly remembered that when I was a child I had believed what that book taught, and that since, I had never once thought whether I did believe it or not. I knew I was going to die; and there was a certain phrase in that book which seemed very plain to me at that moment, 'It is appointed to all men once to die, and after that the judgment.' I don't know how it happened that I recollected it so well, for it was years since I had read it; but somehow I did; and again I thought that my brain would give way, for kill myself I must; and if *that* was true, it would not do to think any more; and so I got up and walked to the table. Now, Ellen, listen to me quietly; don't agitate yourself in this manner; for God's sake be calm. If Alice should wake, what would she think?"

I struggled with myself, conquered my agitation, and made a sign to him to go on.

"Just as I was loading the pistol," he said, "some one knocked at the door; I instinctively seized on the case; and putting it into the bureau locked it up, and went to the door. I had expected to see the housemaid or my own servant, and almost staggered back when, on opening it, I saw Mrs. Tracy, Alice's grandmother. Her coming took me so entirely by surprise that I did not attempt at first to send her away, or to conceal from her that I was in a state of mental agitation. I sat down on the nearest chair, and stared at her in silence. She locked the door; and, sitting down opposite to me, said in a calm and perfectly resolute tone of voice:

"'Mr. Henry, you have done something dreadful to-night, and now you intend to do something worse; but you shall not.'

"I tried to *rouse myself.* I stammered out that she was out of *her mind — beside herself*; that I was busy, worried; that I

begged she would go; that I insisted upon it; and I tried to work myself into a passion. She got up; and looking me full in the face, said sternly.

"'Don't lie to me, Henry. I know you; I know what you have done; I know what you mean to do; but God has sent me to save you.'

"'None of your cant, Tracy,' I now exclaimed in a violent passion; 'leave me; this moment leave me.'

"'Mr. Henry,' she said, 'do you remember *this?*' and she put something into my hands.

"What a strange change is sometimes wrought in us in an instant, Ellen! It was a small picture of my mother — of her who died in giving me birth — of her whose image had often stood between me and temptation, and delayed the ruin it could not avert. I had given this miniature to Tracy, and had charged her to keep it for me on the day when I first left home for school. It brought back to my mind a train of childish recollections, and vague reminiscences, which completely overcame me. I pressed the picture to my lips. My pride gave way; tears burst from my eyes; and in that moment of emotion I confessed the whole truth to her. She had guessed it all before.

"Her brother had been aware for some time past how deeply I was involved in debt. He knew the state of my affairs, and that I neither possessed, nor had the means of raising a single shilling. Escourt, with whom he had some previous acquaintance, had informed him, as they met at the door of the office, that I had just paid him the large sum of £3,500. These facts, coupled with my paleness and incoherence; my pretending that the key was at my lodgings, while he perfectly knew that my father had given it me a moment before in the office; above all, my telling him that I was not going home, and appointing him for the next morning, while, by dodging me in the streets, he ascertained that I had gone straight home; — all this had left no doubt in his mind as to the state of the case; and his sister happening to be in town, and at his house, he had imparted to her his surmises. All this *she repeated to me*; and then, crossing her arms and standing *before me*, she said, 'And now what is to be done?'

"Upon this followed a conversation, all the details of which I need not give you. It began by her suggesting a variety of plans for extricating me from my difficulties, each one more hopeless and more unfeasible than the other. It ended by her proposing an arrangement, which she had long previously had in contemplation, and which the events of that evening had only hurried into maturity.

"And now that I am arrived at this point in my history, Ellen, it is necessary that I should explain to you some circumstances which can alone account for this strange proposal. My sister has told you, I believe, that I owed my life as a child to this woman's unwearied devotion. The kind of passionate attachment which she showed me, and the influence of a strong though uncultivated mind, kept up in me an habitual regard for her which lasted beyond my childish years. When a boy at Eton, and even when I was at Oxford, I used often to write to her, and always to visit her whenever I went through London. On these occasions I always saw her beautiful little grand-daughter, whom she brought up in the strictest seclusion, and with the most anxious care. Even then, I detected the dawning of a scheme which she had evidently formed, and dwelt upon, and cherished, till it had grown into a passionate desire to see Alice married to me. She used occasionally to throw out hints on the subject, which I treated as jokes; and when she confided to me, two years before the time which I am speaking of, that her brother-in-law, an old miserly grocer at —, had left Alice £1,500, she looked anxiously into my face, and seemed disappointed at the indifference with which I received this communication, which she charged me to keep a secret. She lived so much alone, and the nature of her character was such, that whatever idea suggested itself strongly to her mind, took by degrees such a hold of it, that it absorbed all other considerations, and acquired a disproportionate magnitude. She admitted to herself no possibility of happiness for Alice but in a marriage with me. She had a superstitious conviction that such an event was predestined: she had dreamt dreams and had visions on the subject, and *would gladly, I believe*, have sacrificed her life to accomplish it.

"When, therefore, by a singular train of circumstances, she found me in a situation of hopeless difficulty and danger, from which nothing but the immediate possession of a large sum of money could rescue me, she offered me Alice's fortune and hand; but annexed to this proposal the following conditions. She said—

"'Give me a written promise, signed by yourself, and witnessed by two persons whom I shall bring with me here, that you will marry her, when I call upon you to do so. Give me, besides that, a written statement of all the circumstances which have led to this arrangement between us. Let it be signed and witnessed in the same manner. Execute a deed, by which, in the event of your dying before this marriage takes place, Alice will be entitled to whatever you possess, and in which you will give me full sanction to reveal all the particulars of this transaction to your family, and call upon them to make up to me for the sum which I shall now place at your disposal. Give me your promise that Alice shall never, as long as she lives, be made acquainted with the circumstances which have led to this compact, and neither before or after her marriage have any reason to suppose that such an arrangement was entered upon. Do this, Mr. Henry, and by to-morrow morning £10,000, paid into your hands, will enable you to discharge your debts, and to reassume your position in the world.'

"I need not tell you, Ellen, how much my pride, how much my feelings, revolted against the sale of myself which this bargain involved, and, above all, how hateful it was to me to place myself in the power of this woman and of her brother; but situated as I was, there was no choice between death or disgrace on the one hand, and a blind acceptance of her conditions on the other.

"I strongly remonstrated, however, against the second of her stipulations, which seemed to have no other object but that of keeping me continually in her power; but she was determined to carry this point; und at last I consented to give up to her the letter I had already written to my father, which, together with the other papers, to be drawn up the next day, made out a case against me, such as would enable her at any moment to expose me to the world, *and blast my reputation.* These papers are no doubt to this day in *her possession.* I have never offended or displeased her without

her recalling this fact to my recollection. *Now* it signifies comparatively little to me whether she has destroyed them or not. I told her she was in honour bound to do so on the day I married Alice; but whether she has or not, I have not been able clearly to ascertain. *Now*, she cannot use them against me without doing an injury to her; and on this subject I have ceased to trouble myself. Well, she left me that evening, having, a second time, saved my life; and grateful I should have been to her, had it not been for the spirit of distrust, and hard bargaining, which she had evinced throughout, and which modified my gratitude in a way which I regretted myself. The next morning she returned with her brother, and a lawyer, who drew up my will, and saw me sign it, as well as my promise of marriage. John Harding looked gloomy and dark; he evidently disapproved of the whole affair, and thought his niece had the worst of the bargain, as I heard him muttering to himself; but he was always completely governed by his sister; and though he has since attempted to annoy me in different ways, he has never yet ventured to act for himself, except in that foolish attempt to frighten you at Brandon, which his son forced him into, and which he thought, if successful, might be more profitable to himself than the arrangement as it then stood. Now, Ellen, can you understand, that, after all this, in spite of Alice's beauty and of her merits (for I do not attempt to deny them), the idea of marrying her was always connected in my mind with so much that was painful and disgraceful in my past life, that I shrunk from it with a morbid repugnance, which I vainly tried to conquer?

"Now, Ellen — now I am come to the time when every feature of my history is closely connected with yours. Dearest Ellen, listen to me calmly; and if I speak of feelings which must not now be proclaimed to the world; if, in going over the ground which we once trod together, words of love and of regret escape my lips; forgive me! bear with me! and forget everything but that I have loved and lost you — that I deserve to be pitied."

After a pause, he said, "I have not asked you for a promise of secrecy; *I am not afraid of being* in *your* power; but, dear Ellen, *there are facts which I am* now going to reveal to you, which con-

cern you personally; and yet which you must give me a solemn promise never to reveal to any one."

"If they concern me personally," I hastily replied, "surely I can decide for myself on that point; I will bind myself by no promise. You are not afraid of being in my power, and you are right; but you wish — forgive me, Henry, I must speak the truth — you wish to keep me in yours; and this is ungenerous."

"When you know the truth," he answered coldly, "you will retract this unkind accusation. If you intend, which I suppose is the case, to marry Edward Middleton, you are no doubt anxious to keep no secret from him; but I protest unto you, Ellen, that if you do marry him, especially in ignorance of the real nature of your position, you will bring upon yourself, — I said it to you once before, — incalculable misery! You do not believe me, — I see you do not!" he exclaimed, with impatience; "but you *must* believe me if I swear!" and snatching up Alice's Bible from the table near us, he laid his hand upon it, and swore that he spoke nothing but the truth.

"I do not intend to marry Edward Middleton," I said; "I never will inflict upon him a wife, whose heart and whose life cannot be laid open before him. I would sooner die than reveal to him the dissimulation I have already practised, the threats I have heard from your lips, the words of love I have been compelled to endure from you, — from you, the husband of Alice, of whom you are as unworthy, as I am of him. No, I shall never be Edward's wife; I never will bring sorrow and disgrace upon *him*. I have stooped to deceit; I am entangled in falsehood; I must drink of the poisoned cup which you hold to my lips; but, with *you* at least, I will be true! Since there are to be no secrets between us, Henry Lovell, I will tell you what I have never told any human being; and that is, that I love Edward with all the powers of my soul; with all the passion, and all the tenderness, which outlives hope, and feeds upon despair!"

As this burst of wounded feeling escaped from me, I laid my hand on the sacred book before me, and, turning to Henry with *flashing eyes and glowing cheeks*, I said, "What are your conditions? — dictate them."

Again I saw in his face the fearful expression which recalled to me the scene on the sea-shore at — Bay.

"I make none," he replied, with a withering sneer; "I leave you to the tender mercies of those whom you love. When Edward learns, not from me, but from one who shares with me the secret of Julia's death, the details of that catastrophe; you may then seek for consolation and tenderness at his hands."

I saw, by a sudden change in Henry's countenance, how deadly pale, how dreadfully agitated mine must have been, for he looked almost as terrified as I felt; and, giving one rapid glance into the next room, he seized on some water that was on the table, and held it to my lips. I swallowed a few drops; and in a hoarse voice articulated — "Speak, speak!"

"Swear solemnly," he cried; "call God to witness, that you will never reveal to Edward the facts that I will now disclose to you, nor the history of Julia's death."

"I do; so help me God! and may He judge between you and me! Speak, while I have strength to hear you!"

"Your strength is not likely to fail you," he retorted, with a sneer; "for your courage and your eloquence seem always equal to the task of braving and insulting me: when you hear what I have now to tell, perhaps you will regret the harshness of your language."

He paused for a moment, and then, in a more natural tone of voice, he said, "A few months after the occurrences which I related to you just now, I went to Elmsley. You know as well as I do in what way we spent that summer. You were grown into a woman: but you were still a child, a child in spirits, and in careless gaiety; and I scarcely thought of you but as such. I hardly was conscious of my own feelings, till I was enlightened as to their nature by the increasing dislike and repugnance with which I turned from the idea of my engagement to Alice. One day, to my great surprise, my sister told me that Mrs. Tracy had been with her to consult her as to her future abode; and, to my inexpressible annoyance, she also informed me that she had offered her the cottage at Bridman, *and that* she had readily accepted it. From *the moment that I heard this,* I was in continual dread of a meeting,

that might bring to light our relative positions; for I still had a vague hope that something or other might occur to prevent the accomplishment of this hateful marriage. I wrote to Mrs. Tracy, to urge her, in the strongest manner, not to come to Bridman, a step which, I assured her, would answer to none of the parties. She instantly conceived the idea that I had fallen in love with you; and she wrote me letters full of the most violent reproaches and upbraidings; and, a short time after, having come alone to Bridman, to inspect the arrangement of the cottage, she walked over to Elmsley, and made her way to my room, unobserved, as it turned out, by any one in or about the house, with the exception of my own servant. *That* day," continued Henry in a hurried and nervous manner, "was the 15th of July. You know my room at Elmsley — the window was open — we heard voices and footsteps on the verandah — we looked out — I need not tell you what we saw — dreadful words burst from Tracy's lips —"

"O God! O God!" I exclaimed, as Henry paused in the excess of his agitation, "O God of mercy, my punishment is greater than I can bear!"

Henry went on — "I know not what inspired me to act as I did. I locked the door of the room inside, and, springing from the window on to the verandah, and then down the bank, I was in a moment where at one glance I saw the hopeless result of what had occurred. I felt terrified for you —"

"Would to God!" I cried out in so loud a voice, that, with a look of terror, Henry laid his hand on my mouth; "would to God!" I repeated in a lower tone, "that you had then proclaimed to them all what I had done. Would to God! that you had dragged me into my uncle's presence, and denounced me as —"

"Hush, hush, be quiet and listen to me: I rushed back to my room; I found Tracy pale with horror; and when I told her that the child was dead, she wrung her hands, and again cried out that you had killed her — murdered her. My rage then grew so dreadful, that it overpowered hers. You know, alas! you know, how fearfully I can give way to anger; but it must have been horrible that day, for that iron-nerved and ungovernable woman *trembled like a leaf* before me. I forced her to promise, that if

you did not accuse yourself, she would never reveal what she had seen, or let it be known that she had been at Elmsley that day. I made her leave the house in secret, and laid the strictest commands upon my servant not to tell any one that she had been with me, which, as he evidently suspected me of a love affair with Alice, seemed to him quite natural. Hitherto she has kept her word to me; but I cannot conceal from you that no efforts of mine have ever succeeded in rooting out of her mind the conviction that Julia's death was not accidental. In the stupid and malicious obstinacy of her nature, she persists in believing that you intentionally removed the obstacle that stood between you and the eventual possession of Mr. Middleton's fortune. She had been unfortunately told by some of the servants of the house, at her previous visit to Elmsley, that there were constant disputes between you and Julia; and her suspicious jealousy on Alice's account had worked her up into such animosity against you, that she even then carried home with her the idea that you hated and persecuted my sister's child. She has, however, as I have already told you, kept her word to me; but there is one circumstance under which I am perfectly certain that she would break it; and that is, if, by a marriage with Edward, she saw you on the point of obtaining those worldly advantages, which she supposes that you sought in so dreadful a manner. She is haunted by the idea that Mr. Middleton will leave his fortune to you; and, by a strange mixture of vengeance and conscientiousness, she is really tormented by the belief that she is committing a heinous sin in keeping the truth from him; and the only way which I could find of calming her scruples, was by informing her of the conditions under which I happen to know that your uncle has settled his property, and by solemnly assuring her that you will never submit to them."

"Thank you," I answered coldly, and got up to go. Everything in that moment seemed turned to stone. I owed Henry an immense debt of gratitude according to this account, but not an atom of it could I show or feel. On the contrary, all the evil in my nature was stirred up, and I felt more than I had ever done before, as if I *hated him. Perhaps it* was that he had proved to me what I *had hitherto never in reality* believed, though I had often said it to

myself, and that was, that a barrier indeed existed between me and Edward, which no effort of mine could remove.

"Do not go yet," he said; "there is more that I must say to you. You have a right to ask me —"

"I have nothing to ask you," I hastily replied; "from the fatal hour when, by an unpremeditated act, I put the seal to the misery of my whole life; when by the most unfortunate union of circumstances, you and your tyrant became the witnesses of that act, I have lost the power of free agency — I have lost the power, the right to resent, what every woman should and does resent."

"Ellen!" exclaimed Henry, "your coldness, your calmness, make me more miserable than your violence did just now. Do not you *now* understand, why with tears, with threats, with supplications, with the energy of despair, I implored you to become my wife — and in secret? I thought you loved me; had I not a right to believe it, too? Had not your words and your actions given me that right? Once married to you, your fortune — (I could not say this to many women, but to you I can) — your fortune transferred to Alice freed me at least from that part of my engagement to her; and, as your husband, would I not have toiled day and night to supply its place? Would we not have both scorned all that calumniators, or enemies, could do against us? If in her anger Tracy had spoken out — which was not likely, when she saw nothing to be gained by it — would I not have carried you away from all that could have marred your peace? Would I not have cherished you, and worshipped you through life, and to the hour of death, and warded away from you every harsh word or unkind look? Ay!" he exclaimed suddenly, as I turned coldly away from him, "hate me as much as you choose, but do not set me at defiance! It is not Edward, your excellent, your conscientious lover, who would take to his arms, and cherish in his bosom —"

"Do not talk of *him*, Henry," I exclaimed; "do not for God's sake talk of him. I have told you already that I shall never marry him; I have made all the promises that you required. I am *here*, where I should not be, if I wished to set you at defiance; but in *mercy do not taunt* me; do not torture me by alluding —"

A loud rap at the door startled us both, and awakened Alice.

CHAPTER XIII.

"But there where I have garnered up my heart,
Where either I must live, or bear no life,
The fountain from which my current runs
Or else dries up — To be discarded thence!"

"I know his eye doth homage other where,
Or else what lets it but he would be here?
* * * * *
Since that my beauty cannot please his eye,
I 'll weep what 's left away and weeping die."

SHAKSPEARE.

THE knock at the door, which had put an abrupt end to the long and painful conversation between Henry and myself, was soon followed up by a message from Mr. Middleton to say he was waiting for me at the door to take our afternoon drive. I kissed Alice hastily, rejoicing that the room was dark, and hurried down stairs. I found my uncle evidently much put out. Whether he immediately saw in my face traces of emotion which displeased him, or whether he had heard before something which had annoyed and irritated him, I could not at first discover; but I felt sure that he was working himself up to a scene, which, to say the truth, is a difficult business to a man of a naturally calm and even temper. We drove however for some time in silence, which was only broken by two or three attempts on my part to enter into conversation; he answered each of my remarks by a short yes or no; and as we turned back towards London, after having driven on for some time along the Paddington road, he suddenly said, "I really cannot understand how a girl, brought up as you have been, can conduct herself in the way you do. I am sorry to say so, Ellen; but you really are a thorough coquette — a regular actress."

"How so? What do you mean?" I stammered out. "What have I done?"

"I was not aware till to-day," he rejoined, "that you had refused Edward. It is strange enough that you should not have mentioned this circumstance, if not to me, at least to Mrs. Middleton, *who, certainly,* deserved your confidence; but I suppose *you felt ashamed, and so* you ought to be; for, after all the en-

couragement you gave Edward, after speaking, looking, and acting as you did during the month that he spent at Elmsley, none but a heartless flirt could have refused him." Weakened and agitated by the scenes I had gone through during the last twenty-four hours, I burst into tears at this harsh reproof. Mr. Middleton hated seeing a woman cry, and still more making her cry; but as he had made up his mind to treat me with great severity, my tears, by annoying him excessively, only added to his anger.

"I must also tell you, Ellen," he continued, "that I am shocked and disgusted at the manner in which you allow Henry Lovell to dance with you, and talk to you wherever you meet him. You sanction in this way his neglect of his wife; and, considering all the circumstances of the case, your conduct, in that respect, is unjustifiable. Pray, may I ask if he was at home during the four hours you have just passed in his house?" I coloured violently, and muttered that he was, but added, "Did not my aunt tell you that Alice had sent for me?"

"She told me," replied Mr. Middleton, "that *Henry* had requested one of you to go to her. She ought to have gone herself; but, considering how little in general you seek Mrs. Lovell's society, and that for days together you do not go near her, I should have thought that a shorter visit might have sufficed. But be that as it may, I positively declare to you, that unless there is an immediate change in your whole manner and way of going on, I shall forbid Henry my house, and lay my strictest orders upon you not to go to his. This may painfully enlighten Mrs. Lovell," he continued, "but it will be better for her to be thus enlightened, than for a coquette like you to be allowed to rob her of the affection of her husband."

"This is unjust, this is cruel," I exclaimed; "Alice herself is not more pure than I am from an indelicate thought, or an evil design. You wrong me; I do not deserve such language; and even from you I will not endure it. Forgive me, dearest uncle, forgive me; but indeed you do me a grievous injustice." I seized his hand and pressed it to my lips.

"Why did you refuse Edward?" asked my uncle, in a softened *tone.*

"Because I do not wish to marry; because I am certain that I could not make him happy."

"All humbug and nonsense," interrupted Mr. Middleton, angrily; "I only hope that he will soon make up his mind to give up all thoughts of you, and to marry....."

"Who?" I inquired, with breathless anxiety.

"A girl," answered my uncle, "who has good sense and good feeling sufficient to appreciate him as he deserves to be appreciated." As he said these words Mr. Middleton drew from his pocket a newspaper, and began reading it in that pertinacious manner which puts a full stop to any further conversation.

I would have given a great deal to have asked him if he had alluded to any particular person, or whether he was speaking in general; but I had not courage either to interupt him or to begin upon the subject again. During the first part of our drive I had made a great many reflections and resolutions; amongst others, I had come to the determination that I would give up steadfastly and for ever, all thoughts of Edward as a husband, and content myself with the measure of kindness and regard, which, in spite of what had occurred between us, he had not withdrawn from me. I hoped that this decision, consistently acted up to, would satisfy Henry, and induce him to treat me with consideration and respect. I had even formed a plan of prevailing on Mr. and Mrs. Middleton to leave London almost immediately; and in the idea of devoting myself to them, and to a life of domestic duties and charitable exertions, away from the two persons who, on different grounds and in different ways, I feared most in the world, a prospect, of tranquillity at least, offered itself to my mind. But unfortunately for me Mr. Middleton's last remark threw me into a state of agitation, which overturned in one instant all these visions of peace and self-denial. I could have made up my mind to give up Edward, but when it occurred to me that, at that very moment, he had, perhaps, given me up, and was on the point of attaching himself to another, the jealous pang that shot across my heart, proved to me that I would endure any suffering rather than passively resign *my claim on his* affections. This new anxiety superseded, *for the time, all* my other griefs and vexations, and the

instant I got home I went to Mrs. Middleton's room, and tried to find out from her (what I had not ventured to ask my uncle) whether there was any particular person whom he wished Edward to marry. She assured me that she had not heard of anybody being in question for him; but added, that as Mr. Middleton was very anxious that he should marry, and as, to their great surprise and regret, they had heard that morning, that I had refused him, and so put an end to what she knew had been a favourite scheme of my uncle's, it was not improbable he might have formed some other project; and then, in a manner as kind as Mr. Middleton's had been harsh, she blamed and wondered over my apparent inconsistency and caprice. She did not, however, allude to Henry, or repulse my lame attempts at self-defence, with anything but a deep sigh and a melancholy shake of the head.

There was to be a ball the next night at a Mrs. Miltown's, a sister-in-law of Mrs. Brandon, and among my good resolutions had been that of excusing myself, on some pretext or other, from going to it, for I did not know how to comply with Mr. Middleton's orders with respect to Henry, without irritating the latter in a way which I dreaded to encounter. What made me most uneasy was, that quite contrary to his usual habits, my uncle had announced his intention of going with us to this ball, and I could not help thinking that it was for the express purpose of watching me, and under his severe and observant eye, it would be next to impossible to convey to Henry the explanation which would account for my change of manner to him; but now that my whole soul was bent on finding out who the person was to whom my uncle hoped that Edward would devote himself, every other consideration gave way before that overwhelming interest. I could not have imagined beforehand to what a degree it would have harassed me. I felt as if the time that was to intervene between that evening and the next would be interminable; the images of Henry, of Alice, of Mrs. Tracy, faded away before the phantom which my imagination had conjured up, and it was with feverish impatience that I awaited the approach of that hour which I thought would confirm or dispel *my fears.* *It came* at last, as all hours do, whether they have

been longed for with all the intensity of ardent expectation, or dreaded with all the anguish of terrified apprehension.

When I came down to the drawing-room, dressed for the ball, Mrs. Middleton exclaimed, "You look unlike yourself to-night, Ellen! Have you done your hair differently from usual? No" (she continued, as she passed her hand gently over my forehead) — "no, it is not that; I can't make it out: that darling face of yours changes often enough from sunshine to clouds, and from clouds to sunshine; but I never saw it look just like to-night."

I kissed her fondly, but said with some impatience, "Let us go — we are very late."

We went accordingly, and my uncle with us. When we entered the room, it was crowded to suffocation, and we made our way with difficulty to some seats, near which Mrs. Miltown and Mrs. Brandon were. Henry was talking to the latter when we came up to them; he gave me his chair, and ensconced himself in a corner behind us. I felt that Mr. Middleton's eye was upon me, and I entered into conversation in the most eager manner with Mrs. Brandon, in order to avoid speaking to him. He bore it for a little while; but soon touching my arm gently, he said in a low voice, "Come and dance; I want to speak to you."

I answered in the same tone, "No, I can't — don't ask me."

"Very well; you will explain this to me later," he rejoined, in a manner in which my penetration or my fancy detected something dictatorial, which annoyed and provoked me. Wherever I stood, whenever I danced, to whoever I talked during the next two hours, I felt conscious that his piercing eyes were fixed upon me with a scrutinizing expression which I could hardly bear. Added to this, I saw that Mr. Middleton, who knew nobody, and spoke to nobody, was concentrating all his powers of observation upon us both, and was watching him as pertinaciously as he watched me. At last, unable to endure this any longer, and grievously disappointed that Edward had not appeared, I asked Mrs. Middleton to go. She consented to do so, and we walked together *into the tea-room* on our way out. Henry followed us, *and while his sister was speaking* to some one else, he whispered

to me in the bitterest tone imaginable, "Pray is this dead cut the result of our yesterday's conversation?"

"How is Alice to-night?" I asked with a trembling voice; for Mr. Middleton at that moment had joined us again and was standing by my side.

"Much better, thank you, and very anxious to see you to-morrow morning," he said in a pointed manner.

"That will be impossible," observed Mr. Middleton, coldly; "for we have promised to go to-morrow to Mrs. Moore's, at Hampstead, and we shall remain there two or three days."

A sudden cloud passed over Henry's countenance; but he said, in a manner which was meant to be careless, "I wish you joy, Ellen, of leaving London in this hot weather. The country will be delightful. I suppose it was at your desire that this arrangement was made?"

"No," I answered; "it was an agreeable surprise to me. I was not aware till to-day that my uncle knew Mrs. Moore so well, nor that she had a villa at Hampstead, nor that I was likely to see Rosa again so soon; and delighted I shall be to see her again."

"Oh, she is charming," answered Henry, in the same indifferent manner; "I always told you so. I wonder if you will have anything of a party. You will meet Edward there, I suppose; I saw him for a moment this morning, and he said he was going to the play with the Moores to-night."

He turned away, and whispered something to Mrs. Middleton which made her smile and answer, "It would do very well."

If there is in the varied range of human feelings one of pain, which in its mere *sensation* resembles joy, it is that of pouncing, if one may say so, on something tangible when the mind has been racked by a vague jealousy. It is like the relief which we feel when, after anger and indignation have been for some time smouldering in our breasts, at length they burst all barriers and find vent in words. At once I remembered that Rosa was, as Henry had said, charming — that she had a good fortune — that *she was the most* likely person in the world for Edward to admire, *and for my uncle* to approve of; and that very evening he was with

her, with them all; he had preferred their society to ours; it was *sure* — it was hopeless — it was *too late*. Too late! that cry of bitter regret, or of agonized despair, whether it comes from the lips of those who lose all that makes to them life worth having, or from those from whose trembling grasp that same mysterious thing called life is escaping. It was too late to struggle — too soon to submit. Oh, that I had run all hazards — accepted all chances — braved all dangers but the one of losing him! If I had ever told him of my love — if I had revealed to him the depths of passionate affection which those only feel who love in spite of all that should make them tremble and despair! If I had done this but once, he might have forsaken me, scorned me, abandoned me, but he never would have forgotten me. Other eyes would have seemed to him without light — other smiles without brightness; in their tame affection, in their common-place regard, he would have missed what my proud heart and my eager spirit yielded him; all its prostrate enthusiasm — its impassioned humility — its boundless devotion; abject as a slave's, exalted as a guardian angel's.

"How do you do, dearest Ellen? how glad I am to see you again! Will you let me introduce mama to you?"

The violent start that I gave as Rosa stood before me and addressed me in this manner, made her laugh, and the silvery tone of that little gay laugh grated upon my ear.

"Why, I have frightened you as much as the invisible men of Brandon frightened me!" she exclaimed. "What fun that was, Ellen! I am afraid we shall have no adventures at Hampstead, but I 'm so glad you are coming there to-morrow."

As Henry approached us she turned to him.

"How are you, Mr. Lovell? It is ages since we have seen you."

"You come so late," said Henry; "was the play so charming that you could not tear yourself away?"

"Oh, we should have been here long ago if your friend Mr. Middleton *had allowed it;* but when papa and mama, with their *undramatic, unexcitable spirits*, were preparing to go, he inter-

fered so successfully that we carried our point, heard the very last words, saw the curtain drop —"

"And enjoyed it all very much?"

"Oh thoroughly — entirely! We cried at the tragedy and laughed at the farce, till I have no strength left for the dull bit of real life that 's going on in the next room."

"Come, Ellen, the carriage stops the way," cried Mr. Middleton; and in a moment we were down the stairs and in the carriage. My aunt's first words as we drove home were, "How uncommonly pretty Rosa Moore is! There is something very attractive about her."

"Very," I answered; and there was something in the manner in which I pronounced this single word that made her try to get a glimpse of my face as we went by the next lamp-post. I threw my head back impatiently into the corner, and exclaimed, "Really, one does get tired to death with this going out night after night."

"Then I suppose you like the idea of our visit to Hampstead?"

"Oh, particularly! Who shall we meet, do you think?"

"Nobody but Edward, and one or two other men, Mrs. Moore told me to-night."

The carriage stopped and I went to bed, but not to sleep; not at least till I had tossed about for some hours, with a feverish pulse and a perturbed spirit.

The next morning ushered in one of those broiling days which destroy all one's energies, and take away all wish for motion and exertion. The shutters of the drawing-room were partly closed to exclude the rays of the sun; the smell of the flowers in the *jardinière* was almost oppressive, and the very cries in the street seemed uttered languidly, and without their usual shrill spirit. After breakfast I sat down at my drawing-table, and tried to finish a sketch of the inside of Westminster Abbey, which I had begun the day before. As I was preparing my colours and arranging my brushes, the door opened and Henry walked in. "Your sister is in her room," I immediately said; "I will tell her that you are here;" and I got up for the purpose.

"Really, Ellen," he said, "I suppose you are not going to *behave to me now* as you did last night. I protest to you that I

cannot and will not bear it. I am come for the express purpose of seeking an explanation."

"Then go to Mr. Middleton, and ask him to give it you. After undergoing all that I suffered yesterday at your house; after leaving it with a throbbing head and an aching heart, I had to go through a scene with my uncle, in which my feelings were wounded to the quick and my pride cruelly humbled. What is all this to lead to, Henry? What do you expect? What do you require? I am accused of thoughts, of designs, of conduct, which are as foreign to my mind as they are abhorrent to my feelings; but if this is nothing to you—if you care neither for what I may suffer, or for what others may think of me, let me tell you that if at this moment Mr. Middleton knew that you were here—if last night he had seen me speak to you, or dance with you as usual, an order would be given at the door never to let you in again."

"He would not dare to insult me in such a manner," exclaimed Henry with violence; "my sister would never endure it."

"He *would* do it," I repeated earnestly; "he is stern and uncompromising to a degree which, till latterly, I did not know myself; and if now—"

"He has hated and persecuted me from a boy; he is the original cause of all I suffer; he will drive me to some desperate act of guilt or folly before he has done; but, by God, if I am not revenged—"

"Hush, hush; you don't know what you are saying or doing," I cried, as he walked about the room in the most vehement agitation. "Be calm, I implore you. We are going out of town now for a few days; soon after that, we return to Elmsley. We shall be separated for a long while, Henry. Why will you not strive to conquer this unhappy, this fatal fancy? That I should be forced to speak of it—to acknowledge its existence—is dreadful enough; but do give me hopes, dear Henry, that you will try to overcome it; that you will endeavour to make Alice happy, and to find happiness yourself in your home, that when we all meet again, we may be happy together, and the miseries and agitations of this last terrible year may *seem to us as a dream.*"

He did not answer, but I fancied he was touched by this appeal,

and I went on: "I owe you much gratitude; I feel it, I acknowledge it. Perhaps I was hard and ungracious yesterday, when I ought to have been softened by your kindness; but how can I feel towards you what I wish to feel, while you speak and act in a way which you know you would despise me yourself if I did not resent?"

He interrupted me by abruptly inquiring if we were indeed going to Elmsley soon.

"Almost immediately, my uncle said this morning."

"For how long?"

"An indefinite time."

He knit his brows, and said, after a pause, —

"There is truth in what you said just now. We ought all to live happily together, and I have not taken the right means of promoting that end. I have been foolish, mad; I now see the consequences of it all. Ellen, speak to me often as you did just now; it soothes, it calms me. I see things in a different way from what I did a moment ago. O, dearest, best beloved! say to me sometimes, dear Henry, as you said it just now, and I will try to be to you, and for you, all that you can wish and desire. Open your heart to me without reserve, Ellen; if new difficulties present themselves to you, perhaps I may be able to serve you in cases where it might seem hopeless to apply to me — where you might suspect me of not even wishing to be of use to you. I cannot explain myself now, for you had better go and call my sister. After what you said had passed between you and Mr. Middleton yesterday, I feel that we must not remain here alone together. You see," he said, with a melancholy smile, "how reasonable I am grown. Go, dearest Ellen, but remember what I have said to you. For your sake I would make sacrifices, even," he added, in a low and tremulous voice — "even if your happiness required it, the greatest of all. Good-bye, dearest Ellen — God bless you!"

I left the room; and, was it strange that after this conversation, I left town for Hampstead, carrying away with me a better opinion of Henry than I had ever had before? Was it strange, too, *that a vague hope* arose in my heart, from the few words he had *said, that my fate*, with regard to Edward, might not be hopelessly

sealed, if at least the hateful vision of his dawning attachment to Rosa Moore did not realise itself? Whether it was strange or not, the fact was so; and, in such a state of mind, at about four o'clock, I drove out of London, and in a short time arrived at the gates of Mrs. Moore's villa.

CHAPTER XIV.

Mark where she smiles with amiable cheer,
And tell me, whereto can ye liken it?
When on each eyelid sweetly do appear
An hundred graces as in shade to sit,
Liketh, it seemeth in my simple wit,
Unto the first sunshine in summer's day,
That when a dreadful storm away is flit,
Through the broad world doth spread his goodly ray.

SPENCER.

I DO not know a pleasanter sensation than that of driving into the grounds of a country house or a villa, after a prolonged stay in London. The change is so sudden from oppressive heat, bad smells, and ceaseless noise, to bright sunshine, (for even the sun seems to be contaminated by all it shines upon in a large town,) pure air, delicious perfume, and the voices of the birds, who, I maintain, never sing so sweetly and so unceasingly, as within a few miles of London. The change is so great, that we feel more strongly than ever the value of that we have been voluntarily foregoing, at that time of the year.

Those days when summer supersedes the spring,
And smiling June's expanding roses fling
Their perfumed odours o'er the passing breeze,
That sweeps enamoured o'er the fairy trees;
When melody pervades the cloudless sky,
When streams of light intoxicate the eye,
And every waving branch, and leafy bower,
Bursts into song, or blossoms into flower.

As we got out of the carriage, and walked on to the lawn to meet Mrs. Moore, my eyes fell on a group, which not all the soothing effect of the change I have just described could enable me to look upon without disturbance.

On a swing, fastened by ropes to two horse-chesnut trees, stood Rosa, with a bright colour in her cheeks, a large straw hat loosely tied with blue ribbons, and her hair falling on her shoulders in rich curls, which the wind blew about in every direction. Three men were standing near her; two of whom (and Edward was one of them) were gently moving the ropes backwards and forwards, while she shouted out in that silvery voice, which, however loud, was always sweet, "Higher, higher still!"

When she caught sight of us, she sprang hastily down from her elevated position, and rushing to me across the grass, seized both my hands, and exclaimed in the eager tone of a child who offers his favourite toy to a new comer, "Should you like to swing?" I smiled, and shook my head; on which she drew me to a bench, and sitting down herself on the grass before me, began rattling away in her usual manner, at the same time making garlands of all the daisies within her reach.

As Edward and the two other men approached us, I recognised in one of them Mr. Manby; the other was unknown to me, but Rosa said carelessly, without looking up from her wreath, "Mr. Escourt, — Miss Middleton."

It immediately struck me, that this must be the very person who had played so conspicuous a part in Henry's unfortunate history; and my bow of acknowledgment was stiff and ungracious. That portion of Henry's narrative had made a deep impression upon me. The form of wickedness which I have always held in the greatest abhorrence, is a deliberate attempt to lead others into vice; and the efforts which this man had made to complete Henry's ruin, after having so largely contributed to bring it about, and the hypocrisy with which he had sought to conceal his malice, appeared to me instances of those crimes, which are not the less revolting because they do not render the perpetrator of them amenable to the laws. It was not in my nature to weigh with accuracy the correctness of such impressions, or to make allowances for the probable exaggeration of Henry's statement; but, if I had doubted before, one glance at Mr. Escourt's countenance would have been enough to dispel that doubt. I took a sudden and violent aversion to him. His was one of those calm faces that con-

cealed the lurking devil of his malignity; there was a repulsive gentleness in his voice, and a detestable sweetness in his manner, which made me thoroughly comprehend the feelings Henry described himself to have experienced during the interview that had proved so fatal to him.

Edward's manner to me was more friendly perhaps than usual; it seemed in the same spirit as his last words in the breakfast-room in Brook-street. Little did he know all that had passed through my mind, and worked upon my feelings, since that time. I was almost angry with him for speaking to me so kindly and gaily; I fancied that it was since his new attachment, that he had ceased to look upon me with severity; that he had become indulgent, because he had grown indifferent; and the pain which this supposition gave me, involuntarily, though not unconsciously, influenced my manner to him; and I answered with irritation some trifling question which he addressed to me. As usual, when this was the case, he suddenly broke off the conversation; but, this time, instead of walking away, sat down on the other side of Rosa; and while Mr. Manby was plying me with the heaviest kind of small-talk, I heard her telling Edward one piece of nonsense after another, which made him laugh in a short, sudden, joyous manner, which had the effect of making me snub Mr. Manby, in a way which even his pertinacity was not proof against. He turned to Mr. Escourt, who was standing near him, and whose very disagreeable eyes had been fixed upon me for the last few minutes, and proposed to him a game at billiards. They walked away; and Rosa, turning suddenly round, and observing probably that I looked vexed and discomposed, asked me if I should like to see my room. I jumped up, and followed her to the house; she led the way up-stairs, and established me in a charming room; where, as soon as the door was closed upon her, I threw myself down on the couch, with a feeling of utter wretchedness and discouragement, differing from anything I had yet experienced.

The window was open; there were green trees close to it, the waving of whose branches I could see from where I was. Large nosegays of flowers were placed upon the table, and now and then the air from the garden dispensed the delicious perfume which it

had stolen from a bed of mignonette. There was also that drowsy hum of insects, the very song of summer, which we love, not for its beauty (though there *is* beauty in its sleepy busy monotony), but for all it recalls; for all the associations it brings to our minds. I was very tired; and I remained some time on the sofa in a state of abstraction bordering on sleep. I was roused from it in about half-an-hour by some snatches of an old song, which sounded almost like the chirpings of a bird, so sweet, and wild, and unconnected was their melody. I jumped up from the couch, and went to the window; it looked on a small garden, closed in by a slight green railing. It was one mass of flowers, perfectly dazzling in their profusion, variety, and beauty. In the centre was a large cage made of trellis-work, within which creepers grew, and marble vases filled with fresh water stood. Dozens of birds,

"Whose starry wings
Bore the rich hues of all glorious things,"

were flying about it in giddy enjoyment. The love birds sitting quietly and lovingly together on a corner of the same perch, the weavers with their endless tails, the miniature dove, the cordon bleu, with his turquoise breast, and the little cardinal, with his self-sufficient pomp, were all there, and seemed to bathe and to fly, to eat and to drink, to love and to quarrel, as freely as if they still ranged through the boundless depths of their native woods.

And near them stood the singer of that wild melody, which had woke me from my short sleep. There she was like a little queen in the midst of her own fairy kingdom. She was dressed in a silk gown, whose train swept over the gravel walks as she moved slowly along. A berthe of the richest Guipure old lace was clasped on her breast by one single pearl pin; some sprigs of the deep red salvia were fastened in her hair. She held a large pair of garden scissors in her hand; and, as she walked along, she cut the dead flowers from the bushes, as she passed, and flung them aside; every now and then a fresh burst of song springing from lips which seemed only made to smile. She came nearer to the house; and, while cutting off a drooping moss-rose from its stem, she stood where the slanting rays of the evening sun threw a rich glow over *her auburn hair* and her blooming cheek.

I could hear now the words of her song, and recognised those ines of Montrose, the Hero and the Bard:

"My dear and only love, I pray,
That little world of thee,
Be governed by no other sway
But purest monarchy."

The dead rose, the song, those images of beauty and of joy, he connection of ideas which they suggested, were all too much for ne. I turned back into the room, and, as I did so, I caught sight f myself in the standing looking-glass opposite. My pale face, ny heavy dark eyes, my black uncurled hair, were before me; hey seemed to tell my life's history; all, all its sad secrets were here; its love, its hate, its pride, its remorse, its anguish, and ts despair.

I remarked that day at dinner that Mr. Escourt seemed parti- ularly anxious to ingratiate himself with me, perhaps because I iad seemed reluctant to allow him to do so, which with some men s apt to make them strain every nerve to succeed; but, as I de- idedly repulsed all his attempts to make himself agreeable, he de- oted his attentions to Mrs. Middleton, who seemed amused and nterested by his conversation; and I was obliged to admit that he vas clever, in spite of my antipathy to him.

It is unpleasant to meet in society a man, who we have secret easons to know would be shunned by all those who value truth and ionour, if certain facts were revealed, and the veil drawn aside vhich hides from the world his real character and conduct. And vhen those we love and respect speak of their regard for such a erson, and call him their friend, it is difficult to repress the ac- using words which tremble on our lips. Such thoughts passed hrough my mind as I sat at dinner that day watching Mr. Escourt, vhile he poured into Mrs. Middleton's ear his amusing anecdotes, nd saw her look of interest as she listened to him. I felt it yet nore when, after dinner, I heard my uncle invite him in the most ordial manner to Elmsley; and above all, when Edward addressed im as "My dear fellow," I gave a start of impatience which must ave seemed *unaccountable to* Edward, who looked at me with *affected surprise.*

After dinner we all sat on the stone terrace before the house; and while I strove in vain to shake off the gloom which gathered over my spirits more darkly every hour, I could not disguise from myself that Rosa had never looked more lovely — had never appeared to greater advantage. Whether with perfect gravity and a genuine brogue she related, at Edward's request, the wonderful history of Daniel O'Rourke, who held on to the moon by its horns; or whether, on some remark of Mr. Escourt's on the subject to which all her feelings were alive, in a few words of rapid and fervent eloquence, she spoke of the sufferings and the wrongs of Ireland, of its injured honour, its misrepresented creed: whether with the joyousness of a child she showed off the tricks of her little dog by the side of the garden lake, or, stepping into the boat which was made expressly for her use, she seized her oars and rowed us across like the Lady of Loch Katrine: in each movement there was grace; in each mischievous glance there was playfulness; in each word there was animation; and Edward laughed gaily, or listened with interest, while even Mr. Middleton seemed excited and amused.

When we returned into the house, Mr. Manby asked Rosa to sing; and as we all pressed her to do so, she sat down at the pianoforte, and sang in succession English ballads, Irish melodies, and Jacobite songs, which last she seemed to take particular pleasure in. During a pause, Mr. Escourt said,

"Pray, Miss Moore, what was it you were singing to-day before dinner, in your own garden? Something very wild and pretty."

"Did you detect me making a noise?" she asked with a smile; "a shocking noise, my little brother calls it. He did not wish to find fault with me himself the other day, so he whispered to me while he was playing with some wooden animals, 'Rosa, these deer say to me that you make a shocking noise.' But this is what you mean, I suppose," and she began Montrose's love-song.

"This may be all very well," exclaimed Mr. Escourt, when she had sung it, "for a man who fights and writes verses; who *carries, as he says*, a sword and a pen, as should his mistress *discard him*, he would no doubt console himself with that same

sword and pen: but I should think, with nine women out of ten, a dismissal would be the result of so very dictatorial a declaration. Why, only listen to him:" and he repeated the following lines: —

"Like Alexander I would reign,
And I would reign alone;
My soul did evermore disdain
A rival in my throne.
He either fears his fate too much,
Or his deserts are small,
Who dares not put it to the touch
To win or lose it all.

"Would you stand this, Miss Moore?"

"Why," she said, as her fingers ran carelessly over the keys, "I should not feel much inclined to let Alexander reign *at all;* but I should not quarrel with him for choosing to reign *alone*. Would you, Ellen?"

"No," I answered, "only for believing it possible that he did *not* reign alone."

I involuntarily turned my eyes towards Edward's as I said this. They met his, and their expression was so earnest and affectionate that a thrill of pleasure ran through me.

Mr. Escourt laughed and said,

"Why, you would have your hero still more convicted than he is. To my mind,

'I 'll never love thee more,'

is, under any circumstances, the most impertinent speech a lover can make, and one which no woman ought to forgive."

"Oh, indeed," exclaimed Mr. Manby, "I am quite like Montrose. I would never care for a woman who did not love me above all things."

"Nor make her famous by your pen, nor glorious by your sword?" murmured Rosa, as she bent over the music-books.

Edward smiled; but this time it was my eyes he sought; and by my side he sat down, when we left the pianoforte and went into the next room.

I will not *minutely record* the details of our proceedings, or of *the various alternations* of hopes and fears which agitated me du-

ring the next few days. Sometimes when Edward spoke to me, his voice had a tone, his eyes an expression, which made me forget for an instant everything but what I heard in that tone and read in those eyes; and the ecstacy of such moments made the contrast darker and bitterer each time, when, under the influence of my secret misgivings, or of my jealous pangs, that flash of transient joy gave way before the gloom which suddenly succeeded it. Mrs. Middleton had taught me to tear away the veil from my own thoughts and feelings — to be true to myself, and merciless to my own illusions; and therefore, though I could sometimes read love in Edward's eyes, — though I could see, that when an expression of strong feeling escaped me, it awoke emotion in his soul, and struck a chord which vibrated to the touch; I could also see the struggle which he made to master and repress these feelings. I saw well his deep appreciation of the pure and unsullied truth of Rosa's character. When *her* eyes were fixed upon him with the bold simplicity and innocent daring of one

"Who feared no danger, for she knew no sin,"

I have seen him turn to me with an earnest gaze of thoughtful inquiry, which I dared not meet but by a mute appeal for mercy. I had heard him murmur in a low voice one evening, in which storms of jealous anger and gloomy abstraction had swept over my soul and clouded my brow, I heard him murmur, as Rosa's joyous laugh reached our ears,

"O, blest with temper, whose unclouded ray
Can make to-morrow cheerful as to-day!"

I had heard this, and yet I did not hate her. No, God be praised, and I bless him for it! not all my sufferings, not all my faults, not even the tortures of jealousy itself, have robbed me of that one pure emotion, that one spontaneous impulse — instinctive homage to what is pure, admiration of what is good. But how I envied her the privilege of truth! how bitterly I contrasted her fate with mine! when, one day, I saw her snatch up her little sister to *her knees*, while Mr. Escourt was asserting that there was no one *who would willingly* consent to lay open their thoughts to another,

and devouring her with kisses, exclaim, "Now, Minny, you know I should not mind if you could read every one of my thoughts."

At the outset of this history of myself, and of my sufferings, I had to gather strength for the task: one fatal day stood out in dreadful prominence; and to describe it was to live over again its agonising hours. Again I feel the same kind of emotion; again I must pause; for I am arrived at that moment which dragged me down a step lower into the abyss which I had seen from afar off, and from which I had vainly struggled to recede. For days, for weeks, I have shut up this book, and put it aside as an enemy whose sight I feared; but, like the rattlesnake, this very fear fascinates and subdues me; and as the stern spells of memory cannot be conjured away, they must be braved and conquered.

CHAPTER XV.

"La douleur a trahi les secrets de son âme,
Et ne vous permet plus de douter de sa flamme."

RACINE.

"Cet Hymen m'est fatal, je crains et le souhaite,
Je n'ose en espérer qu'une joie imparfaite.
* * * * *
Que je meurs s'il s'achève ou ne s'achève pas."

CORNEILLE.

ONE morning, after we had been a few days at Hampstead, I felt the greatest wish to slip quietly out of the house and stroll about alone for an hour or two. I had been in the habit of doing so at Elmsley, and I found nothing so effectual as this in subduing agitation, and recalling my mind to a state of composure. After making the tour of the grounds, walking round the lake, and dawdling some time in the shrubberies, I opened a small gate into a lane which led towards the common. This lane was scarcely wider than a path, and was only divided from the grounds of the villa by a ditch and a slight railing. I was intently occupied in examining an ant's nest, and the various evolutions performed by its black citizens on the sudden fall of a snail among them, which *had dropt off* a branch of dog-roses while I was *gathering it, when all at once* a sound as of many people running,

joined to loud cries and vociferations, caught my ear. There was something ominous in the noise, and my heart beat quick as I looked with a mixture of fear and curiosity towards the end of the lane which opened on the heath. The noise increased; and suddenly round the corner and into the lane dashed a dog, followed by several men armed with pitchforks, and shouting. The appalling cry of "A mad dog! a mad dog!" struck distinctly upon my ears, and brought a deadly faintness over my limbs, and a cold sweat on my forehead. I tried to run, and my strength utterly failed me. I tried to scream and could not. The animal was coming nearer and nearer. I clung to the railing; the shouts grew louder: "Get out of the way! — a mad dog! — get out of the way!" Two more seconds, and the beast would have been upon me, with swollen tongue, glaring eye, and foaming mouth, when, quick as lightning, across the ditch, and over the railing, sprang Edward, with a face as pale as a sheet, and almost convulsed with terror. The dog was close to me; he seized it, flung it across the hedge into a pond on the other side, and dragged me to the grounds, and up to a bank, on which he placed me. For a moment I closed my eyes, overpowered by the terror I had felt, and the sense of escape from it; but I heard Edward murmur, in a tone of anguish, "Good God, what shall I do?" I opened my eyes and looked up into his face; it was so dreadfully pale that I exclaimed, "You are ill, very ill; for God's sake sit down."

"No," he answered, "no; now that you are better, it is all right; I will go home and send somebody to you."

"I can go now," I said; "I can walk." But what was it I saw at that moment on the ground before me? There were spots of blood on the gravel! There was blood on Edward's sleeve! Sudden as the flash that rends the skies, as the bolt that blasts the oak, the truth burst upon me! I neither shrieked nor swooned; the very excess of anguish made me calm. On Edward's hand was the fatal scar. I seized his arm, and so quickly and suddenly, that he neither foresaw nor could prevent the act. I pressed my lips to it, and sucked the poisoned blood from the wound. When he tried to *draw his hand from* my grasp, I clung to it and retained it with the *strength which* nothing but love and terror can give.

When, at last, by a violent effort he disengaged it, I fell on my knees before him, and clinging to his feet, in words which I cannot write, with passion which no words can describe, I implored him by that love which had been the torture and the joy of my life, its bane and its glory, to yield again his hand to me that I might save his life as he had saved mine. As he still refused, still struggled to get away, I seized on the blood-stained handkerchief with which I wiped my mouth, and eagerly clasping it to my bosom I exclaimed, "*This*, if you leave me, shall make me run the same risks as yourself. If there is poison in *this* blood it shall mingle with mine."

An expression of intense emotion passed over Edward's face in a moment, and his resolution suddenly changed. He sat down on the bench and held out his hand to me. "Do what you will," he said. "Nothing but death shall part us now."

There was such thrilling tenderness, such intense feeling in these few words, such belief in me, that, as I sank on my knees by his side, and pressed my lips again on that hand, now passive in my grasp, while with the other he supported me as I knelt; as he fixed his eyes in silent but ardent affection on mine, there was such a suspension in my soul of everything but deep, boundless, inexpressible love, which thrilled through every nerve, and absorbed every faculty, that I could have wished to die in that state of blissful abstraction..... The blood had ceased to flow; the task of love was over, and still I knelt by Edward's side; still his arm supported my head; still he murmured words of tenderness in my ear — when we were roused by the sudden approach of Mr. Middleton, who, having heard of the pursuit, and of the death of a mad dog in the immediate vicinity of the grounds, had been anxiously looking out for me. I started hastily from my kneeling position, but Edward still kept his arm round me; and turning to my uncle he gave him, in a few words, an account of what had occurred, of my danger, of his agony, when, from the fishing-house, he saw the imminence of that danger, of my escape through his means, of the bite which he had received as he seized on the dog, and of the manner in which I had drawn the poison from the wound. "She has done by me," he said with a voice which

trembled with emotion; "she has done by me what Queen Eleanor did by her husband; but when I suffered her to do so, she had confessed what makes me happier, on this day of terror and anxiety, than I have ever been on any other day of my life. Wish me joy, Mr. Middleton, of the dearest, of the tenderest, of the most courageous, as well as of the loveliest bride that ever man was blest with."

As Edward finished these words, his arms drew me closer to him, and he kissed my cheek, which had grown, during the last few seconds, as pale as it had been crimson a moment before; and it was not love that now blanched my cheek, and made me tremble in a way which made the support of Edward's arm a matter of necessity. It was not the emotion of happiness that kept me as silent as the grave, when Mr. Middleton fondly kissed me, and blessed me for what I had done, and for what I had acknowledged. My uneasiness grew so evident that both my uncle and Edward were suddenly struck with the same fear. It occurred to them both, at the same time, that I was ill from the terror I had undergone, and the exertion I had made; both led me towards the house with anxious solicitude, and with the tenderest care. A change had come over Edward's manner; he too looked dreadfully ill, and the nervous tension of his usually calm features was painful to see. They carried me up to my room, and when I was laid on the bed, Mrs. Middleton's dear voice and tender kisses occasioned me a burst of crying, which relieved the intolerable oppression under which I was labouring. My uncle took Edward almost by force out of the room, and Mrs. Middleton followed them, after placing my maid by my bed-side. She returned in a few moments, and by the direction of the doctor, who had been sent for, she gave me a nervous draught, and kept me as quiet as possible. I grew calmer, but my tears continued to flow in silence. I did not see my way before me; it seemed to me that suddenly, involuntarily, almost unconsciously, I had become pledged to Edward, that our engagement might at any moment be proclaimed to the world, and the dreadful results which I knew would follow, stared me in the face; *and yet how to retract* — what to say — what to do, was a difficulty *which I saw no means* of surmounting, and every kind of contra-

tulatory whisper of Mrs. Middleton, which was meant to soothe and gratify me, threw me into inexpressible agitation, as it showed me that Edward, my uncle, and herself, considered me as much pledged to him, and our marriage as much the natural result of the acknowledgment, which in that hour of anguish and of terror had escaped from me, as if the settlements had been signed and the wedding-day named.

Towards evening I fancied that I saw on Mrs. Middleton's countenance an expression of uneasiness, as she came into my room; and, with trembling anxiety, I asked her how Edward was.

"He is not well; but nothing to make us uneasy," she added, as she observed the look of terror in my face. "What you so courageously did, dear child, and the subsequent searing of the scar, which, as a measure of further precaution, was done, have entirely secured him from any danger of that dreadful kind; but the exertion, the agitation, and the operation itself, which was very painful, have brought on some fever, which it will require care and prudence to subdue."

This new anxiety diverted my thoughts, for the time, from the difficulties of my own position, and I roused and exerted myself in order to be allowed to leave my room, the solitude of which I dreaded in my present state of restless excitement; but society seemed to me still more trying when I had to encounter it. I could hardly bear to hear the occurrences of the day discussed. Everybody was informed of what I had done; and the praises which were bestowed on my courage and presence of mind, were uttered with smiles and tones which proved to me, that if they were not aware of all the circumstances of the case, it was at least sufficiently evident that the feelings which had prompted me at the moment had been attributed to their true cause. Rosa, especially, tormented me by allusions and playful attacks, which I could hardly bear with patience; and at last I showed my annoyance in so marked a manner, that she abstained from any farther reference to the subject.

Later in the *evening*, when the doctor came again, he found *Edward's fever much increased*; and when this intelligence was

brought to the drawing-room, Rosa showed true and warm sympathy in the anxiety which I could no longer conceal.

A few minutes afterwards, Mrs. Middleton beckoned me out of the room, and told me that Edward was in a state of intense nervous irritation, which was the more extraordinary, from its contrast with his usual calm and quiet disposition. "He is quite unlike himself," she continued, "and can hardly be persuaded to submit to the necessary restraint which the doctor prescribes. He says he *must* see you, and speak to you, this evening; and insisted on getting up and coming to the drawing-room. At last, I persuaded him to lie down again on his couch, by promising that you should come to him. After what passed between you this morning, there can be no objection to it. Only, remember, dear child, that everything you say to him must be calculated to soothe and calm him, for Dr. Nevis says that he could not answer for the consequences of any agitation or sudden emotion at this moment. This it was that determined me to come and fetch you, when I saw him so feverishly anxious to see you; especially, as *now*, I am sure, that you can have nothing to say to him that will not have a tranquillising effect on his nerves, and help to give him a good night's rest, which is the greatest possible object in his present state."

As my aunt talked on in this manner, while she led the way to Edward's room, I could not summon courage to object to this visit, till when we got near to the door, I drew back and whispered to her, "Indeed I had better not go in; after what occurred this morning, considering all things, it may agitate him to see me. Indeed, indeed, it will be better not." Mrs. Middleton looked at me with surprise, "Have I not told you, Ellen, that he has been working himself into a fever, from his anxiety to speak to you? The only chance of calming him is by yielding to this wish, and I assure you," she continued in an earnest manner, "it may be more important than you seem to think, to accomplish this. The consequences may be very serious, if this fever and nervous agitation should increase."

As she said these words, without any further discussion she *opened the door*, and I found myself in another moment seated by

Edward's side, his burning hand in mine, and his eyes fixed upon me with that intense and overstrained expression which fever gives.

"Dearest Ellen," he exclaimed, as Mrs. Middleton left the room, "I am unreasonable, and ashamed of myself, but I could not rest, or have a moment's peace, before I had again heard from your lips the blessed assurance, that all that made me so happy this morning, in spite of our fears and anxieties, was not a dream. Say it was not, dearest."

"It was no dream," I answered, in a low voice, "but we must not speak of such dream-like things to-night. When you are well —"

"I am well now," he interrupted, "if you relieve my mind from a vague fear that has haunted me ever since. Ellen, there is no obstacle to our marriage, is there? You will be my wife? You do not answer; you do not speak?"

His hand, which held mine, trembled, and he grew paler still than when I had entered the room. Terrified at his agitation, I lost the last opportunity of retracting, and murmured, "Yes, yes, dearest Edward, I will be your wife. — May God in Heaven bless you, and forgive me!" I internally added; "and now that I have set your mind at rest," I said with a forced smile, "I will leave you."

"Leave me!" he rejoined, "now that you have made me happier than words can express! No; don't leave me now, my Ellen, my darling Ellen; whom I have loved since the days of childhood; whom I have watched with an earnest anxiety, that has made me, I will own it now," (he kissed my hand tenderly as he said this,) "often unreasonable — often unjust."

"No, no!" I exclaimed, "that you have never been."

"Yes I have, Ellen," he continued, with earnestness; "though I saw much in your voice, in your countenance, and in your manner, that made me feel I was not indifferent to you; still I was tormented with doubts and with jealousies, which were unworthy of you and of myself. What I now see was only pity and kindness *for others, I construed* into causes for suspicion: what *I now feel was forbearance* and delicacy of feeling on your part, I

called *deceit*. I thought you deceitful; I called you deceitful: yet my own heart contradicted me, Ellen: for it would never have loved you, clung to you, as it has done, had you not been true, truer in your changeable moods and unguarded impulses, 'than those that have more cunning to be strange.' No, my dearest, my precious love! if falsehood or deceit had ever stained those dear lips of yours, if they had ever sullied the purity of your spotless nature, my love would have vanished, and my heart hardened against you. The very strength of my own affection pleaded for you, when appearances, or my own jealous feelings, accused you. Will you forgive me, dearest?"

"Forgive you!" I exclaimed, while a choking sob rose in my throat, "God knows —"

"I do not doubt you," he eagerly cried; "I do not ask you to explain or to reassure me. Have I not already acquitted you, and accused myself? I should be a wretch, my Ellen, if, after having received from you the greatest proof of love which a woman could give, the shadow of a doubt could remain on my mind, of the purity and of the strength of your affection. Do you think, my own love, that I should have suffered you to give me that proof of unexampled devotion, had I not believed and felt that you were then suffering the agony of apprehension, which I had suffered a moment before? that your love was great as mine, and that is saying everything; for I feel now, Ellen, that to lose you would kill me."

I laid my head on his shoulder, and murmured a few words of tenderness in his ear. My heart was swelling, and my head was dizzy. Three times, while he had spoken, I had been on the point of breaking out into vehement denials, and passionate self-accusations; and each time the doctor's warning, confirmed by Edward's tremulous voice and eager hurried manner, so different from his usual composure, checked the words on my lips, and thrust back into my bosom the remorse and shame which overwhelmed me. Yet, in the midst of all this suffering and this shame, there was a joy which, like a meteor in a stormy sky, *illuminated at* moments the darkness with which it struggled; and, *to drown the* voice of conscience, I repeated to myself, that in

spite of the deceit I had practised under the influence of what I deemed an irresistible fatality, there was truth, there was reality, in the ardent affection which I bore to him whose hand I held, and against whose breast my burning forehead was laid, as if I sought there a refuge from the world, from myself, and from my own upbraiding memory.

After a pause, but in a voice of perfect confidence and tenderness, Edward said to me, "Why would you not marry me three months ago, dearest? Did you think that my love was not great enough, or was yours not yet—?"

"Oh, no," I interrupted; "such love as mine is not the growth of a few days; but ask me not to explain the waywardness, the strange inconsistency of a character, which you, wise and good as you are, can never perfectly understand."

There passed a slight cloud over Edward's countenance at that moment, but it was only for an instant; and in the gentlest manner he said, "Perhaps I may never quite understand you, Ellen, but I can always trust you. You have always been unlike everybody else, particularly unlike me, with my matter-of-fact stubbornness, and that is probably why you bewitched me against my will; and in spite of all my resolutions," (he added, with a smile,) "I suppose I never have quite understood you; but to admire blindly and ardently what we least understand, is one of the peculiarities of human nature; so you must e'en admit this excuse."

Again he kissed my hand with the fondest affection; and then at my earnest request he suffered me to leave him. Before I went, I told him that while we were staying at the Moores' I was anxious that our engagement should not be openly acknowledged, as in so small a party, and with people whom I knew so little intimately, it was pleasanter to me not to have to talk over the subject. He submitted to my wish, and I left him to go to my own room, and devise there some means of escaping from the difficulties in which I had entangled myself more fatally than ever.

It was not till in the silence of the night I sat alone and undisturbed, *that I realised to* myself the occurrences of the day, or *saw in its full force the im*portance of what I had done. There

I sat, Edward's affianced wife; and any moment after this fact was made public, my persecutor might seek him or Mr. Middleton, and tell them that but for me, Julia would be still alive; and when summoned to deny the foul charge, and confound the vile calumniator, should I say, "Yes, I struck the helpless child in my anger, but I meant not to kill her; I have buried the secret in my heart; day by day I have received her father's blessings, and her mother's kisses, in hypocritical silence. I have listened, Edward, to your words of love; I have promised to be your wife, with a lie in my mouth and deceit in my heart; but now I am found out, and I implore mercy at your hands; and that you will believe me when I say, that I did not mean to kill my cousin;" and may be, (I exclaimed, interrupting myself with a burst of anguish,) may be, he would not believe me! There is no medium in Edward's judgment when truth is concerned; implicit confidence on the one hand, unmitigated condemnation on the other. Oh! how dreadful it would be to meet his eyes, from which love would have vanished, and to feel that no protestations, no appeals, could reach his heart; hardened, as it would be in that hour, against the miserable deceiver who had usurped its tenderness and betrayed its trust.

After an hour of harassing indecision I determined to consult Henry, and sitting down at a table near the open window, I wrote to him the following letter: —

"The last time I saw you, my dear Henry, you gave me reason to hope that I might in future consider you as a friend. You bade me open my heart to you, and seek your aid when new difficulties should beset my path. The moment is come when I must do so, and if you will not, if you cannot, save me, nothing can. I once told you, that I never intended to marry Edward; and, believe me (you know I have ever spoken the truth to *you*, Henry, even at the risk of rousing your utmost anger); believe me, when I say that *then*, and even as late as twelve hours ago, such a resolution was the steady purpose of my soul. An involutary, spontaneous *acknowledgment* of affection, which escaped me in a moment of *imminent peril* to him, incurred in rescuing me from a similar

peril, was followed by an assumption on his part, that our marriage was to be the natural result of such a confession. My uncle considered it in the same light; and I found myself involved in an engagement, which, in cool blood, I could never have contracted. An attack of illness, resulting from the events of the morning, has since kept Edward in a state which would have made any extraordinary emotion dangerous in the extreme. Against my will, and at the same time, impressing this warning upon me, my aunt took me to him, and in terror for his health, with outward calmness, and inward shame and misgivings, I gave the promise, which must lead to my ruin, unless you can save me. I do not ask your aid, Henry, as a girl who wishes to marry her lover, and frets at the obstacles in her way. No; if at this moment I could cancel the events of this day, and place myself again in the position in which I stood yesterday, I would do so; but, as it is, on either side, I see nothing now but disgrace and misery; and from these I implore you to rescue me. I do not know how far you have the power to do so. I cannot help thinking that your influence with that terrible woman must be great; hitherto I have doubted your willingness to exert it in my behalf; but, in the circumstances in which I now stand, I feel a strong confidence, that what you can do for me, you will do. I have obtained from Edward, that our engagement shall be kept a secret for a few days, which will give you time to act in my behalf, and to communicate with me on the subject. Obliged to conceal the torturing anxiety of my soul from those about me, miserable in the midst of what ought to be my happiness, I feel some comfort in speaking openly to you, and in looking to you for aid, for consolation, and for sympathy. *You* know my sufferings; *you* know my guilt and my innocence, my life's deceit, and my soul's truth. *You* will pity me; *you* will help me; and, in this hope, I make my appeal to you.

"E. M."

I debated some time with myself, as to the means of sending this letter unobserved and undetected. After a few minutes of anxious consideration, I recollected that Mrs. Hatton (the companion of my journey to Dorsetshire the year before) was staying

with her sister, the wife of a surgeon, in London; and it occurred to me, that, by inclosing it to her, and requesting her to put it herself into Henry's hands, I should attain my object, and expose myself to no risk of discovery, as I could rely upon her discretion, and was certain that she would put only the most benevolent construction on my strange request. I accordingly wrote to her these few lines: —

"My dear Mrs. Hatton,

"As you are the kindest person in the world, I am sure you will not be angry with me for giving you a little trouble. Do me the kindness to take this letter yourself to Henry Lovell, and give it into his own hands; and do not mention to any one that I have entrusted you with this commission, as it would defeat my purpose if it was known that I had written to him, or heard from him, in reply. He will probably entrust you with his answer; and I cannot say how much obliged to you I shall be for undertaking this little commission.

"Yours, dear Mrs. Hatton, very truly,

"E. M."

As I sealed these two letters and directed the cover to Mrs. Hatton, I felt that for the first time I was stooping to positive artifice, and that, too, at the very moment when Edward's words were still ringing in my ears. Disgusted with myself, I threw down my pen; and, turning my flushed cheeks and aching head to the window, I tried to catch the night breeze, which was gently rustling among the leaves of the catalpas. When I went to sleep that night, it was to dream over and over again that I was reading Henry's answer to my letter; sometimes it was such as to drive me to despair; sometimes it exceeded my most sanguine hopes; each time that I awoke I glanced at the table on which mine was lying to convince myself that nothing real had hitherto justified these alternations of fear and hope — that made me feel in the morning as if I had gone through a life of agitation, instead of a few hours of restless sleep.

When my maid came in to call me I told her to put my letter *into the post-bag*, and sent her to inquire how Edward had passed

the night. The answer which she brought me was, that the fever still continued strong, but that Mr. Middleton seemed calmer and more composed than the day before; "more comfortable like," was her expression.

I dressed myself hastily, and finding that my aunt was not yet awake, I went down into the garden, and walked to the spot where my fate had been sealed, for good or for evil I knew not yet. As I looked upon the bank where Edward had placed me out of reach of so appalling a danger — as I stood again on that spot where I had seen his blood on the ground — as I knelt against the bench where we had sat together, and hastily murmured over the form of prayer, which I was accustomed to utter more as a sort of charm than as a direct address to God — I felt *then* that to part with him would be, after all, the worst misfortune that could befall me, and a kind of fierce resolution came over me to struggle to the last — to marry him in spite of all dangers; and even the devil whispered to me at that moment that if denounced and accused I might still deny the charge; accuse my accuser in her turn; charge her with having invented a calumnious lie, and with Henry's aid (which one look, one kind word, from me could command) ride off triumphantly, and defy them all. But as the thought passed through my mind, I shuddered at the rapid strides I was making in falsehood, and felt a horror of myself which I can hardly describe. There was I, kneeling in mock homage before God (that God who had saved both Edward and myself from a fate worse than death), while bad passions were raging in my soul, and thoughts of evil working in my mind.

The posture of prayer, the words which I had mechanically uttered, brought on one of those sudden and unaccountable revulsions of feeling which sometimes succeed the fiercest assaults of the tempter, as if our guardian angel had wrestled with the spirit of evil, and driven him away for the time. I remembered her to whom much was forgiven because she had loved much; and as I thought of that Saviour — that man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, at whose feet she knelt — ay, even while seven foul fiends were struggling in her heart, I longed to kneel before Him too in *deep prostration of spirit*, and lay all my sorrows, all my sins, all

my difficulties, at His sacred feet, bathing them as she did with tears, and wiping them with the hairs of her head. Oh! if in that moment of emotion, in that hour of penitence, I could have gone to one of those, who, ministering at God's altar, and endowed with His commission, have authority from Him to pronounce words of pardon in His name; if the fatal barrier which habit and prejudice so often raise between the priest of God and the erring and overburthened souls committed to his charge, had not in my case existed; if from his lips I could have heard the injunction to forsake all and follow Jesus, and he had added, "Do this and be forgiven," it might have changed my fate. But, as it was, my penitence spent itself in unavailing tears, and my yearnings towards a better course ended in the same bewildering and oft-repeated question, which I could not, dared not, answer to myself, or for myself: "Where lies the path of duty through the intricate maze in which guilt, misfortune, and weakness have so hopelessly entangled me?" Once more I rose from my knees, without any fixed purpose, without any steady resolution; the creature of circumstance, and the sport of events.

As I was walking back to the house, I met Mr. Escourt, who joined me, much to my annoyance. After a trifling remark or two, he, apparently as if by accident, mentioned Henry Lovell; I answered coldly, but was conscious that I coloured; more, however, from the recollection of the part which he himself had acted towards him than from any other reason. He fixed his scrutinising eyes upon me, and evidently remarked that something had moved me.

"He is married, is not he, and to a very beautiful woman?"

"Yes, Mrs. Lovell is very pretty."

"I had heard of his marriage," he continued, "but had doubted the truth of the report, from seeing him so constantly about in the world unaccompanied by a wife."

He looked at me inquiringly; but as I said nothing in answer, he went on: —

"I met them walking one day; and by Jove, if he is of a jealous *turn of mind*, he does well to shut her up. A more beautiful *creature I never* set eyes upon. Is she clever?"

This was one of those trifling questions which it is particularly disagreeable to answer, especially when put by a person with whom one wishes to converse as little as possible. Alice was not clever according to the common acceptation of the word; and to explain to a hardened man of the world in what consisted the superiority of her understanding, seemed to me like throwing pearls before swine; but in this I was mistaken; for when I answered, "I cannot exactly say whether she is or not," he immediately replied,

"I think I can guess at your meaning. She has no doubt a mind as fair as her face, but none of the tinsel which we so often take for gold. Is it not so?"

I nodded assent, and he continued —

"Is she a saint, that she thus forswears the pomps and vanities of this world?"

"She is, no doubt," I replied, "one of those to whom the world is in the habit of giving the appellation of saints, whatever sense impiety on the one hand, or cant on the other, may attach to that designation."

"In that case," returned Mr. Escourt, "I will e'en take her for my patron saint; hang up her picture in my room, if I can get it; and say, like Romeo, I 'll turn, fair saint, idolater to thee!"

As he said these words, I gave this hateful man a look of mingled scorn and disgust. He returned it with a steady gaze of insulting pertinacity, and said —

"Kill me not with a look, fair lady; for though lovely is the light of a dark eye in woman, it is also wondrous strong, and can deal wounds which time may not heal."

"It speaks," I replied, "what time cannot change, nor flattery avert."

"Indeed," he rejoined, "are its decrees so unchangeable?"

After a pause he continued —

"Mr. Lovell is an excellent husband, is not he? and amiable in all the relations of life? He is your uncle by marriage, I believe? It is touching to see his devotion to you in that character."

The calm *insolence with* which this was said stung me to the *quick, and I answered* with vehemence —

"He is at least neither a liar nor a hypocrite; and it would have been well for him had he never fallen in with either."

Not a muscle of Mr. Escourt's face moved; and, with a bland smile, he said —

"Your remark is just, fair depositary of your adopted uncle's secrets. Your descriptions of character are admirable, refined in their conception, and bold in their execution — very bold indeed. This last specimen shall remain engraved in my memory. It fully deserves it."

We had now reached the house; and I entered it with the consciousness, that, in addition to my other difficulties and dangers, I had made myself that morning a deadly enemy.

CHAPTER XVI.

"Do you not fear, I will stand between you and danger."
SHAKSPEARE.

THE tedious hours of the two next days dragged on their weary length through the ordinary course of meals, walks, idle occupation, and unprofitable talk. Everything jarred upon my nerves and irritated my temper during this trying time of suspense. Edward's fever still continued, and though there was nothing positively alarming in it, yet it kept us in a state of anxiety. He was not allowed to get up, and I did not see him; but almost all my time was spent in watching for Mrs. Middleton, who was indefatigable in her attention to him, and who, from hour to hour, brought me messages from him, and accounts of the various fluctuations in his state. When I went into the drawing-room, Rosa's liveliness, Mr. Escourt's mute attitude of defiance, Mr. Manby's tediousness, and Mr. and Mrs. Moore's over-solicitude about everything, in turns worried and bored me.

At the end of the second day, as the time drew near when I might expect to receive Henry's answer, this feverish impatience increased to such a degree that I could hardly bear to be spoken to, or noticed in any way. Each time the house-bell rang I gave a *start and a rapid* glance towards the door; and each time a servant *came in*, my heart beat with intense excitement, which each time

subsided into that moody heaviness which disappointment brings on. On the third evening since the one I had spent with Edward, I was allowed to go to him for a few minutes; he was much better, but forbidden to exert himself. I found him pale but very calm; he seemed touched with the alteration in my countenance, and implored me not to worry myself, assuring me that he now felt almost quite well, and the day after to-morrow he hoped we should all return to London, announce our marriage, and begin all the preparations for its celebration. This assurance drove me almost frantic, for if, during the next twenty-four hours, I did not hear from Henry, such a proceeding was like plunging blindfold down a precipice. The only resource I could think of was to persuade Mr. Middleton to go to London ourselves on the next day, and as it would be natural that after this week's absence I should visit Alice, thus to contrive to speak to Henry. When I went back into the drawing-room I was assailed by pressing entreaties to sing; and Mr. Middleton's "Come, Ellen, nonsense!" rendered all excuses or refusals on my part quite unavailing. I went to the pianoforte, envying the woman who said to the King of Prussia, when he had put her in prison for breach of engagement, "You can make me cry, but you can't make me sing;" for I was assuredly made to sing, while my heart was quivering with anxiety, and my mind haunted with fears, which would have made solitude and tears bliss in comparison to what I had to go through. I had just begun, at Rosa's request, a French romance, in fourteen stanzas, when the door opened and a servant walked in with a letter in his hand, which he put down on a little table where I had laid my work. To this letter my eyes and all my thoughts were directed; but the excess of impatience made me afraid of interrupting myself and asking for it. I sang on, and each time that I attempted to skip a verse and arrive at the conclusion, Mr. Manby, civilly and assiduously, reminded me of the omission. At last I arrived at the fourteenth stanza, and then positively refusing to sing any more, I gave up my place to Rosa. At that moment Mr. Middleton, who was walking up and down the room, went up to the table where *my letter* was laid, took it up, looked at the *seal, then at the handwriting*; after turning it on all sides for a

minute or two, while I stood by straining every nerve to appear indifferent, he held it out to me and said, "Who on earth can this be from, Ellen?"

I took it and glanced at the direction — "From Mrs. Hatton," I said; and slipping it carelessly into the inside of my gown, I sat on and worked in silence, listening to the singing till I could find an opportunity of leaving the room unobserved. I flew rather than walked to mine, locked the door, and tearing open the letter read the enclosure it contained with that breathless eagerness which makes us feel as if our eyes were too slow in conveying the sense to our minds.

HENRY'S LETTER.

"I will not attempt to describe to you the state of mind into which your letter threw me. It was no doubt carefully worded, and I give you credit for the pains which you evidently took not to wound my feelings. You have at last learnt to know the nature you have to deal with, and you have not, perhaps, bought that knowledge too dearly, by all you have suffered at my hands. Your power over me is a strange one: when I submit to it, I despise myself; when I resist it, I hate myself. I can never now be happy by you, or without you; and in the wreck of all that once was happiness, I cling to some unsubstantial shadows, which, when I grasp them, only mock my utter desolation. Such are those held out by the last lines of your letter. You never wrote truer or more artful words; true as the arrow which strikes to the heart — artful as the skill of the archer who aims it. You are right — I alone know you; I alone can read every turn of your countenance, every emotion of your soul. I know 'your eye's quick flash through its troubled shroud.' I see the dark shade that passes over your spirit, the clouds which sweep over your soul, rising in anger, and melting into tenderness. I alone know the secret of your wild beauty, of your fierce humility, of your transient joys, and of your lasting sorrows. This knowledge, this power is mine, Ellen, and shall be mine to the last day of our lives; and as long as your *eyes shall meet mine*, as long as your hand shall press mine, in *the spirit which* dictated those lines of your letter, I shall not be

utterly miserable, or altogether without consolation. I shall have one share in your soul which not even Edward can rob me of. And now what shall I say? You foresee it, do you not? Your cheek is flushed with joy, and your breast heaves with triumph. Go, then, and proclaim your marriage. Marry Edward; and when the priest says at the altar, 'Who gives this woman to be married to this man?' think of him who, 'loving you not wisely, but too well,' at the price of his own jealous tortures, of his pride, and of his conscience, opened the way before you. At the price of my conscience I have done this; and now listen to me, Ellen, — I will tell you how. After I had received your letter, and reflected on its contents, till anxiety for you and for your happiness superseded every selfish thought which passion and jealousy awoke, I went to Bromley, where Mrs. Tracy took up her abode again a few months ago. I had hardly had any communication with her since my marriage; and our meeting, as you may well imagine, was anything but cordial. When I opened to her the subject of my visit, she gave way to a burst of anger, in which she vented the long-compressed violence, jealousy, and hatred of her soul. I shudder when I think how often you have been on the brink of what we most have dreaded; twice she had written to Mr. Middleton, and only kept back her letters at the very moment of putting them into the post. She has kept up, by means of her relations, and of her relations' friends, a constant system of *espionnage* upon me, and had been worked up into a state of violent irritation, by exaggerated reports of my neglect of Alice, and of my devotion to you. Far from listening to me, or giving me the least hope that she would yield to my entreaties, she pronounced the most vehement denunciations against you, and vowed that nothing now should prevent her from exposing you — the murderer of Julia, the hateful rival of Alice. Forgive me, dearest Ellen, that my hand can write such horrible words; but it is necessary that you should know what that terrible woman, as you rightly call her, is capable of saying and of doing, and also to account for the line of conduct which I took in consequence. I suddenly changed my tone, and said to her in the coldest and most determined manner, '*Very well; I leave you to* write your letter — to ruin the whole

existence of a person who I declare to you is as innocent as yourself of the crime which you impute to her, — to throw into agitation and despair my sister, whom you profess to love, — and to break your promise to me in the most shameful manner. But mark me! while *you* do this, *I* go home also, to break a promise not more sacred than yours, — to reveal to Alice, from beginning to end, the whole history of our engagement, and of our marriage; to tell her that you have unjustly accused Ellen Middleton of murder, and irretrievably ruined and destroyed her happiness; to tell her that I once loved Ellen Middleton, that I love her still, and that if such is to be *her* fate, *mine* shall be to leave England *to-morrow, alone,* and *for ever.*'

"It was frightful to see the look of rage that convulsed the features of that intractable woman as I pronounced these words. She absolutely writhed with anger, and it was deadly anger, for her cheek was pale and her lips white. She gasped for breath, and then murmured: 'Villain! she is with child.'

"God forgive me, I was indeed a villain! For, although not even to save you would I have endangered Alice's safety, yet my first thought was of the new power which this circumstance gave me over her fierce grandmother; and, without giving a sign of emotion, I begged to know her final decision.

"Then began a fearful contest between us; one of those struggles on which more than life is staked. I conquered at last, and that indomitable will was forced to bend before mine. You are safe, as long as Alice remains in ignorance of the dark parts of our histories; as long as I live with her, and by kindness and respect ensure her comfort and peace of mind, so long will her grandmother adhere to the promise, which she has renewed on these conditions. But you must help me to fulfil them, Ellen. You must not leave me to myself, for then my strength would fail me. It must be under your eyes, and in constant association with you, that I must learn to treat Alice as I now feel myself bound to treat her. One of the principal complaints which her grandmother made, was of the seclusion in which she lived; and *on this point I* must give way, though, as I once said to you, I *tremble for the* consequences; but you must be near us — with

us. Though scarcely older than her, you know where the dangers of the world lie, and you will watch over one who, in her childish ignorance, stands like a guardian angel between you and your persecutor. There is something sacred in the feelings with which we must both regard and cherish her. I look at her now with emotion, as the mother of my child. I bless her in my heart for having saved you from misery and exposure. If you will allow no common prejudices, no vulgar scruples to stand in the way of the good you may effect, then, Ellen, there may be better days in store for us all.

"Remember to announce your marriage in form to us, as soon as it is declared; and remember also, that I will be guarded, prudent, and considerate, as long as you show me unlimited confidence. I cannot answer for myself if caprice, or unjust apprehensions, should estrange you from me.

"Once more, farewell,

"And God bless you!

"Your devoted

"HENRY LOVELL."

This letter dropt from my hands as I read the last words, and a tumultuous rush of feelings made my heart throb with indefinable emotion. In my most sanguine moments I had not perhaps anticipated so favourable an answer, nor hoped that Henry would have exerted himself so earnestly in my behalf; and yet I felt more afraid of him and of his power than ever, as I saw his determination in some manner or other to link his fate with mine, and to make his conduct to me to depend upon mine. There was something fearful in the conditions in the frail tenure under which alone I was to escape the threatened vengeance of Mrs. Tracy. There was something horribly humiliating in the terms (however veiled in plausible language) which Henry was evidently prescribing to me as the price of his protection. I was never a self-deceiver, and I saw clearly through the shallow pretence of better hopes for the future — of kindness to Alice — of help to pursue the better course — *his unswerving determination* never to give up those *habits of intimacy, which* would give full scope for the exercise of

his secret power. I did not charge him with hypocrisy, nor with malice; no, he was only selfish, selfish to the very heart's core. I read his letter again, and when he bade me think of him, even at the altar, even when pledging my faith to Edward, I murmured to myself, "Ever between him and me, in thought if not in deed; ever with thy smooth tongue, thy determination strong as iron, and thy character pliant as steel; ever claiming thy share in my heart, and thy place in my thoughts; ever toiling for thine own ends, and hinting at revenge, even while boasting of thy love, and of the sacrifices it makes."

As this mental accusation passed through my mind, I felt its harshness, its ingratitude, and as usual, having begun by condemning him, I ended by hating myself. I could not but acknowledge that all he said of Alice was touching and true, and I religiously resolved to undertake the part he pointed out to me in the spirit of expiation, and while in one sense I gave her my weak and unworthy support, on the other to cling to her, as to my refuge and my shield, from a love and from a hatred which made me equally tremble. The self-reproach which had immediately followed my harsh condemnation of Henry, at the very moment when he had made a great sacrifice in my behalf, however incomplete its generosity might have been, brought on as usual a reaction, and something of tenderness stole into my heart at the thought of so deep, so unconquerable an attachment as his. In Henry there always seemed to me to be two different natures, one harsh, selfish, sneering and heartless, the other tender almost as a woman's is tender, and gentle even to a fault. Notwithstanding all that I so often suffered from the first, I could not help being at times strangely subdued and touched by the last. His letter, too, like himself, appeared to have a two-fold character, and as I considered it under each in turn, my heart was alternately softened and hardened towards the writer.

Soon I experienced one of those changes of mood, one of those abrupt transitions of feeling, which seem to transform us for the time into a different sort of being from that with which we are *usually conscious* of identity. A kind of feverish determination to *be happy took* possession of me, a careless disregard of the future,

a sort of impassioned levity, of reckless childishness. I walked up and down my room with restless excitement; I longed now to return to London, to have my marriage declared, to be congratulated, to be talked to, to enter on a new state of things, and efface as much as possible, from my life and from my mind, the traces of the past.

When the next morning I got up and dressed, threw open my window, looked upon the bright summer sky, and saw Edward standing on the gravel walk before the house, my heart beat with that hurried pulse of joy, that tumult of emotion which drowns all thought and all care, as a whirlpool sucks in the straws that float near it.

Edward beckoned to me to join him; he received me with a smile of tenderness, and, pushing back the curls from my face, whispered, "My dark-eyed Ellen!" His words of love sunk into my heart, like the rain of Heaven on the scorched and burning sands of the desert, as I gave utterance to the long-subdued and deeply-tried passion of my soul, prostrate in spirit before him, living in the light of his eyes, and almost longing to die in his presence, and by his hand, ere aught in earth, or in Heaven, should divide us. The wilful, terrified abstraction, that made me repulse every thought connected with the future, and cling with frantic intensity to my happiness while it lasted, gave it a character difficult to describe; and Edward, in the very height of his love, and while carried out of himself by its resistless influence, would sometimes ask me, why there was no peace in my happiness, no repose in my love; — why, when his hand held mine, and my head was resting on his shoulder, I sometimes murmured in a tone of thrilling and passionate emotion, "Let me die *here*."

"Ask not," I would then reply. "Ask not why some flowers shut their leaves beneath the full blaze of the sun. Ask not why the walls of the Abbey Church tremble, as the full peal of the organ vibrates through the aisles. Ask not why the majesty of a starry night makes me weep, or why the intensity of bliss makes me shudder."

"But I love you, my Ellen," Edward would answer; "I, too, love you with all *the powers of my soul. My happiness is intense as yours; and yet, in the very* excess of both, there is trust and peace."

"Because," I replied, "because no two characters were ever more dissimilar than ours. A calm and mighty river is not more unlike the torrent which swells with the rain, and ebbs the next day, than your nature is to mine. Do not try to understand me, Edward: I say it in the deepest humility, you cannot fathom the folly and the weakness of my soul; but thus much you may believe, that as the mountain stream, chafe and foam as it may, has but one object and one end, so, the varied impulses and the restless fluctuations of my uneasy spirit tend but to one result—its unlimited love, its boundless devotion, to you."

Edward always seemed touched by the expression of my ardent affection, and responded to it in the tenderest and kindest manner; but it did not always efface from his countenance something of perplexity and regret, which the inequality of my spirits, and of my temper, raised in his mind.

Before we left Hampstead, Mrs. Middleton told the Moores of my engagement; and Rosa, who had for some days past guessed at the state of things, wished me joy, with the greatest warmth and animation; but she unconsciously threw a bitter ingredient into her congratulations, by adding to them with a smile, "It is strange how disobedient you have ventured to be to the invisible men of Brandon. I hope you do not reckon on being punished, as well as threatened, by proxy?"

CHAPTER XVII.

"Too high, too grave, too large, too deep,
Her love could neither laugh nor sleep,
And thus it tired him: his desire
Was for a less consuming fire.
He wished that she should love him well,
Not wildly; wished her passion's spell
To charm her heart, but leave her fancy free;
To quicken converse, not to quell.
He granted her to sigh, for so could he;
But when she wept, why should it be?
'T was irksome, for it stole away
The joy of his love holiday."

PHILIP VAN ARTEVELDE.

DURING our drive to London, Edward asked Mr. Middleton *how long he* intended to remain in town, and where he meant our *marriage to take* place.

"Why that must depend on you both," said my uncle. "What do you say to being married at Elmsley?"

The proposal struck me so painfully, that I looked at Edward with the anxious wish that he might make some objection to it, though I could scarcely hope so. As I feared, he only turned to me, and asked what my wishes were; before I could answer, however, Mrs. Middleton said, that considering all that was to be done about getting my trousseau, and making various preparations for the wedding, she thought it would be better to remain in London. Edward then added that it would be his interest to keep us there, as the settlements would often require his presence in town, but that we might go to Elmsley to be married, if my uncle wished it. To my inexpressible relief, Mrs. Middleton again objected; and urged, that as my uncle and herself would go abroad soon after my marriage, it was useless to add a journey to Elmsley, and back again, to the one they would subsequently undertake. I looked at my aunt with surprise, but she made me a sign not to pursue the subject any further for the present. I gladly acquiesced; but the idea of this journey abroad weighed on my spirits, and made me silent during the rest of our drive.

As we came into London, and arrived in Brook-street, it seemed to me that months instead of days had elapsed since I had left it; and when I entered the drawing-room, I sat down on a chair near the window, and leaning my head on my hand, I tried to realise to myself all that had occurred during the last eventful week. The busy tide of life was at its height in the streets, the noise was stunning, and the air close and disagreeable, after what we had been used to at Hampstead. Nobody had followed me into the drawing-room, and I sat there for an hour or two absorbed in thought, and reviewing in my mind the principal events of my past life. One by one they passed before me; my aunt's first arrival at Elmsley, the day of Julia's birth, when I was called from my drawing-lesson to come and kiss my little cousin in her cradle; the happy time of childhood and of early youth; my hours of study with Mrs. Middleton; my walks and rides through the beautiful scenery that surrounds Elmsley, *sometimes* with Edward and with Henry, or only *with old James behind me;* my favourite chesnut wood, where I

used to throw the bridle over Selim's neck, and leave him to follow his own fancy, unguided and unchecked, through the winding paths and bushy dells; the sound of his hoofs on the crushed leaves, and the murmur of the little waterfall, were in my ears, as when I took Edward there on my fourteenth birth-day, and as we were coming home, after much hesitation, and with a beating heart, asked him if I might take care of his Newfoundland dog, Hector, when he went back to town; and I did not remember the events of the last week more distinctly than I did his nod of acquiescence, and the gush of delight with which I received that permission.

Then came in succession the recollections of Julia's illness — of her recovery — of her death; of the acute and then protracted anguish that followed it; of the delirious agony that seized me on the day of her funeral. I lived over again the time of Edward's departure, the feverish dream of excitement which followed it; I visited again in fancy the cottage at Bridman, and the cavern at the sea-side in Dorsetshire. I thought of the day of Edward's return to Elmsley, and of the Ash-Wednesday service in the village church — that same church where Julia was buried, and where Edward's lips had said *Amen!* to the curse which had seemed to light on my guilty and shrinking head; and *there* they had proposed that I should be married to him! — *there*, in sight of the vault where *she* lay! within the walls which had rung with *that* curse!

"O, no — no," I exclaimed; "not at Elmsley — not at Elmsley!"

A hand was gently laid on my shoulder, and Edward said —

"Why not at Elmsley?"

As I turned suddenly towards him, and then away from him, to hide the tears which were streaming down my cheeks, he said, coldly —

"Are you weeping *now* over the excess of your happiness?"

I did not answer immediately, for in truth I could not; and, taking a book, Edward walked away, and sat down by the chimney. *Other people* came in — I had to dress for dinner, and it was not *till late in the* evening that, by alluding artfully, though not ala-

gether untruly, to the pain with which I had heard of my aunt's probable departure from England (for it had, indeed, been the original cause of my deep depression), I succeeded in removing the tacit displeasure which had obscured Edward's countenance.

I had rather expected that Henry would call in Brook-street that evening, but he did not.

The next day, while I was dressing, Mrs. Hatton asked to see me. I was anxious to know what construction she had put on the commission I had entrusted to her; and I hardly knew how to treat it myself, for if I allowed her to suppose that there was nothing but a trifle in question, she might, at some future time, allude to it without any scruple.

After she had sat down for a few minutes, and answered my inquiries about her numerous nephews and nieces, to whom she was the most beloved, the most tyrannised over, and the happiest of aunts, she said with a smile, "I hope you got the letter in time, dear Miss Middleton?"

"Quite in time," I answered, colouring in spite of myself.

"I thought you would," she rejoined, "for I had calculated that Tuesday being the 5th of July, there would be plenty of time to write again and get an answer before the 9th, in case the patterns did not suit you. I remember so well, in old times, we used always to have little contrivances about Mrs. Middleton's birth-day."

This was exactly what I had feared. Henry had made up some story connected with his sister's birth-day, to account for our secret correspondence; or else he had taken up this idea from her own suppositions; and now there was no reason why she should not, when the day was past, inquire after the result of what had been settled between us before any one who might happen to be present. I therefore resolved to tell her as much of the truth as I could venture to do; and, taking her hand in mine, I said, "My dear Mrs. Hatton, either Henry, with very good intentions, has deceived you on the subject, or your own suppositions have misled you. The letter which I wrote to him, and the answer which he sent me, related to something of the greatest importance, in which the welfare and the happiness of more than one person are

closely involved: both would be endangered if the most absolute secrecy was not observed by you as well as by us, as to this correspondence between Henry and myself. If I felt justified in doing so, I would explain to you —"

"Don't, my dear, don't; I had rather not have it explained; I had rather not hear a secret," cried Mrs. Hatton. "I never liked them; it is much pleasanter not to know things which concern other people; but you may be sure I shall never breathe a syllable to any one about the letters. I only hope, my darling Miss Ellen, that you will always be as happy as you ought to be, so good as you are, and always trying to do good to people, and to be of use. God bless your sweet face!"

My heart smote me at the praises of this excellent woman; and I answered with a deep sigh, "My fate is a far happier one than I deserve, or ever can deserve, dear Mrs. Hatton; for I am engaged to Edward Middleton, and am to be married to him in a fortnight."

"Well, my dear Miss Ellen, I do wish you joy, with all my heart!" (and what a heart it was; there are not many such). "How happy you will all be! Of all the husbands you could have had, I would have chosen Mr. Edward Middleton for you — so handsome — so good — so clever as he is! I remember one day, that poor little Julia was still alive, I said to Mrs. Middleton, 'Now, what a nice thing it would be if your little girl was to marry her cousin some day, and those two fine fortunes were to make but one.' 'No, no,' she cried, 'he admires Ellen too much to wait for Julia;' and then she added — 'Mrs. Hatton, I am afraid that I love Ellen more than Julia; is it not dreadful?' 'And if you do,' I answered, 'what does it signify? Julia will never be the worse for it; there is enough tenderness in your heart for both of them.' But I am grieving you, dear Miss Ellen, by talking of that poor dear little cousin of yours; but you know, dear, everything is for the best, and the dear child might have lived to be wretched, poor thing! Well, well, I will say nothing more about it; but only that it is very pretty of you, my darling, to have kept all your love and your sorrow for Julia so fresh in your heart, *in the midst of* your own happiness. No doubt, she is a blessed

little angel now; and, perhaps, she can see into your thoughts, and is blessing you even now, for remembering her so kindly, and loving her still so much."

Alarmed at the excess of my emotion, which I could no longer command, Mrs. Hatton's distress was so great, that she almost groaned at finding that, instead of soothing me, every word that she uttered increased my agitation. At last, recovering myself, I abruptly changed the subject, and a few minutes after she took her leave.

Later that day I had a long conversation with my aunt; she explained to me, that the doctors had assured her, that it was of the greatest importance that my uncle should spend the following winter in a southern climate; that he was himself extremely opposed to this plan, chiefly on account of his inveterate dislike to leaving Elmsley for such a length of time; and that, she was afraid that if he returned there at all that year, she should never be able to persuade him to leave it again. She seemed very much out of spirits; and she, who seldom gave way to her feelings, although their secret workings were evident enough to me, who knew every turn of her countenance, at this moment seemed unable to struggle with her deep depression.

After a few efforts to overcome it, she threw her arms round me, and hid her face on my neck.

"Dearest child," she said, "never let me suffer through you; anything else I can bear. I see things through a dark mist to-day, and there is a gloom about me which I cannot shake off. I do not often talk to you of myself, Ellen, at least not lately — not since the days when we lived but for each other, and I would not do so now, if an irresistible impulse did not urge me to it. In a few days you will be married, and then will come a separation, which I shall bear with courage; but which will require courage, my Ellen, for I have loved you too much as an idol, too much as a treasure, which nothing could rob me of, and to which I have clung with all the tenacity of a crushed but ardent spirit. All my life I have had to meet indifference, and to struggle with disappointment *in various forms.* Self-devotion was the dream of *my youth; I conceived no other* happiness, and wished to live for

no other purpose. My father was one of those men who can so little understand this sort of feeling in others, that, with perfect kindness and perfect candour, I am sure he would have said, if his daughter had done for him what the Russian girl, Elizabeth, did for her father, 'I suppose she was tired of Siberia, and liked the journey.' When I married, I found in your uncle a character exactly opposed to my father's, but not perhaps more suited to mine. The invincible reserve, the minute despotism, or rather absolutism, of his nature, raised between us the same barrier, which worldliness of mind and absence of warm feelings had caused to exist between my father and myself. You have seen and observed this drawback to our happiness, Ellen, or I should not have pointed out to you this single imperfection in as amiable and excellent a character as ever existed. Your uncle's favourite maxim is, 'Deeds, not words;' and well has he acted up to it himself; but his mistake is, in not perceiving that there are characters in which, without *words*, there can scarcely be *deeds;* for which sympathy and encouragement are as necessary as air is to life, or sunshine to vegetation. For some time after I was married, I struggled to supply the want of responsiveness in his nature, by the expansive enthusiasm of mine; but, worn out at last, by the fruitless and fatiguing exertion of heart and mind, which this kind of continual drawing upon one's own feelings entails, bruised and jarred by the unflinching positiveness which met them at every turn, I gave up the attempt in despair. I did my *duty;* I performed the *deeds* required of me; but the *words*, the unsubstantial, but not unreal, part of our daily lives, of our busy minds, — which must assert itself in some shape or other, — which must find vent in some form, or recoil upon ourselves in moral or physical suffering, — that half of my being remained closed to him, whom I loved and respected, but between whose mind and my own the point of contact was wanting. Of Henry, for many reasons, I had rather not talk to you. You know that I have never hesitated to tell myself the truth, or to destroy an illusion, which in the secrecy of my heart I have felt to *be such; but it* requires a courage and a strength which, to-day *especially, I* do not find in myself, to trace the progress of

estrangement in an affection once as intense as a mother's; and which still asserts its own existence by the sufferings it inflicts. Do not look inquiringly at me, Ellen; I have nothing to tell, nothing to explain, nothing to complain of; I only know that there was a time when my whole soul was wrapped up in Henry, as it has since been in you; — a time when his eyes would seek mine in the hour of joy or of sorrow, — a time when his thoughts were mine, and mine were his; — till something, I know not what, — a mysterious influence, a nameless cloud, passed between him and me, and threw a cold shade over the spirit of our affection; each succeeding year has widened the chasm, has seared the wound, without healing it, and loosened without breaking the links which bound us together. Hush, dear Ellen! do not attempt to speak to me on the subject; there has been a secret sympathy between us lately, which has supplied the place of those unreserved communications, which once were our habit and our joy. Where we have not spoken, we have felt together; and, without the utterance of a word, we have shared each other's sorrows, and each other's fears. And now, child of my heart, be happy if you can. Let nothing of gloom, of suffering, or of bitterness, be connected with my thoughts of you; let no cloud ever obscure your spotless character; let your name never be pronounced but with blessings; your presence never be hailed but with joy. Then, when in absence, I call to mind your loved features, your proud smile, and the light of your dark eyes, I shall need no other vision for my waking hours, no other dream for my nights."

With fervently murmured blessings, my aunt dismissed me; and I went to prepare for a ride with Edward. Before I set out, I wrote a note to Alice, in which I announced to her my approaching marriage; and, by Mrs. Middleton's desire, begged that she and Henry would come to us in the evening.

During our ride Edward was very silent; and when he spoke it was to find some trifling fault with my way of sitting on my horse, and holding my bridle. My heart was still thrilling with emotions *awakened by my conversation with my aunt; her expressions of enthusiastic tenderness* were still sounding in my ears,

and the words of reproof, however slight, which fell from Edward's lips, contrasted with them, grated on my feelings, and irritated my susceptibility. Unlike as they were in many respects, there was one resemblance between Mrs. Middleton and Henry Lovell, which never failed to strike me. Without affectation or exaggeration, by the peculiar qualities of their minds, by the union of a powerful understanding with a lively imagination, joined to a kind of spontaneous eloquence, and a ready command of language, they made every subject which they handled more or less picturesque and exciting. I remembered at that moment that Henry had once said to me, that his sister had done me harm; and I almost trembled as I asked myself, if I should not painfully miss (in spite of my devoted attachment to Edward) that ready sympathy which I had been so long used to, which it was in my nature to require, and not in his to yield.

We were just then passing through some fields near Fulham, and came to a deep ditch with a fence beyond it. Edward crossed it; but strictly charged me not to attempt to follow him, while he examined the next field, and found out another exit; but piqued at his previous observations on my horsemanship, I pushed Selim on, and with a flying leap arrived on the other side. Edward joined me; and when I looked at him triumphantly, he was quite pale.

We rode on without speaking for a few minutes; and when to break this silence, I said to him, "I hope you admire my courage?" he answered drily, "I dislike unnecessary emotions, as much as you appear to delight in them."

After a pause, he added, "Such an instance of disobedience in a wife would be inexcusable; and though submission may be only a duty *after* marriage, I own *I* think it a charm before."

I held out my hand to Edward, with an imploring countenance. He took it; and kissing it tenderly, said with a smile, "I am like the mothers, Ellen, who scold their children when they have been frightened about them; but still remember, my love, *that I* would rather see you afraid of displeasing me, than *displaying a courage* which never captivated me in a woman. It

is a dangerous way of working upon my feelings; and would, I assure you, never answer."

As I had not heard from Alice before dinner, I concluded they would come in the evening; and even while Edward was speaking to me of some arrangements connected with our future plans, I could not keep out of my thoughts a variety of conjectures as to the tone and manner which Henry would adopt in this new state of things. My eyes were fixed on a plan for altering the house at Hillscombe, when a knock at the house-door turned my hands cold and my cheeks hot, and a moment afterwards Alice and Henry walked into the room. She came quietly up to me, kissed me, and said in an earnest tone, "I am so glad you are happy." I held out my hand to Henry, cold and trembling as it was. He carried it hastily to his lips, which felt dry and burning, and said in a rapid indistinct manner, so that no ears but mine should catch the sense of his words, "I wish you joy, and never to feel what I do now." He then went up to Edward, and shaking hands with him in the most cordial manner, he warmly congratulated him, and then presented him to Alice.

Turning to my uncle, he said, "I have just heard a piece of news at the club, which will take you by surprise. Mr. —, your county member, is dead."

"Good Heavens! you don't say so?" exclaimed my uncle; "I saw him yesterday in St. James's-street. Are you quite certain of it?"

"Perfectly certain; and if Edward intends to canvass the county, he had better start directly."

"Edward, you *must* stand," cried my uncle, with all the eagerness of a politician. "You have long wished to get into parliament, and this is a glorious opportunity."

"Not the *time* I would have chosen," said Edward, with a smile and a look at me.

"Nonsense," cried Henry, with the most apparently unaffected gaiety. "It is the best of times. You will be eloquent on the hustings, in order that Ellen may read your speeches in the *newspaper*. *You must be* so broken in to making love, that *it will come quite naturally to* you to do so to every voter's wife or

daughter. With what wonderful effect you will expatiate on the patriotism which tears you away from your affianced bride, to undertake the arduous duties of a champion of the popular cause, or an inveterate enemy of the new Poor Law. But, really, there is no time to lose, my dear fellow; the enemy will take the field to-morrow; and if you do not get the start —."

I impatiently got up, and, standing behind my uncle's chair, I fixed my eyes on Henry, with an expression of stern and indignant inquiry. His eyes met mine for a moment, and the colour rose in his cheek; but he persisted, with unabated eagerness, in urging Edward and my uncle not to lose the opportunity of securing to the former a seat in parliament; to the latter a permanent influence in the county; and to the government an additional vote.

Edward turned to me, and asked me half seriously, and half in joke, for my opinion on the subject. Before I could answer, my uncle said, "I entreat you, Ellen, not to interfere, by any childish nonsense, with what is really important to Edward and to me. For some years past, I have had such a scheme in view, and if we do not carry it into execution now, it may escape us altogether."

I had, in fact, no objection to offer, and, indeed, felt none, except that Henry had suggested it, and seemed anxious to bring it about; therefore, when Edward, more seriously than the first time, asked for my opinion, I made an effort, and constrained myself to say, that he could not do better.

"You must start for Elmsley to-morrow, and take up your quarters there," said my uncle. "I do not feel a doubt of your success, but there must be no remissness on our parts to secure it."

At that moment the servant came up to Mr. Middleton, and told him, that Mr. —, and Sir —, were in the carriage at the door, and wished to speak to him upon business. One was a cabinet minister, and the other one of the most influential landowners in our part of the country.

"*They are come about this very affair*," said my uncle, "and *just at the right moment*; show them into my room down-stairs.

Just give orders, Edward, that Lawson may be sent for; he is personally acquainted with every voter on your estates, as well as on mine, and had better go with you to Elmsley to-morrow; and then be so kind as to join us in the library."

Edward went up to Henry, and said something to him in a low voice, on which Henry followed him out of the room; and Mrs. Middleton, Alice, and I, were left alone together. I had leisure then to look at Alice, and to observe that her situation had become very evident, and that her face, though as beautiful as ever, was paler and thinner than usual. Mrs. Middleton remarked it too; and Alice told her that she expected to be confined in four or five months. The quiet tone of voice, and the gentle smile with which this was said, seemed in strange contrast with the stormy scene in which that fact had been disclosed to Henry.

Mrs. Middleton seemed delighted at finding that this was the case; and asked her several questions, and gave much advice about her health. I fixed my eyes upon them both, and a train of thought was started in my mind, which engrossed me completely, while they went on conversing in a low tone. There we were, sitting quietly together, with smiles on our lips, and the whole appearance of peace, harmony, and comfort, around us. If any one could have looked upon us, themselves unseen, could they ever have imagined on what frail foundation that peace and that comfort rested?

Alice's little hand (which she had just held out to me, as I seated myself at the back of the sofa where she was placed) was locked in mine; Mrs. Middleton, who had shaken off the depression which had weighed upon her in the morning, now talked gaily of my marriage, and the occupations it imposed upon her — of her approaching expedition, and the delight with which she should again return to us in the spring.

If, like the angel who conducted Parnell's Hermit, some heavenly guide had pointed out to an invisible witness of this quiet scene of domestic happiness, the secrets that were buried under its smooth surface, what a start of horror would he not have given, how *would he not have shuddered* if that angel had said, "Look *upon those three women! See* that fair young creature, in whose

pure eyes there is a depth of holy thought and tranquil peace, such as this world can never give or take away; and it is well for her that it should be so; for, beautiful as she is, and priceless as are the treasures of her heart and mind, she has been delivered over to one who counts these treasures as dross, and whose perverted taste sees more of beauty in the turbid stream than in the pure lake, — in the flashing eye and stormy brow, than in the calm gaze of purity and love. She stands alone in the strength of her faith, in the might of her innocence; but even now a new link has wound itself round her heart; and though her step be firm, and her soul be strong, they must wax firmer and stronger still, for the sake of the child whom she bears in her womb. *Now* she is chained down to earth; now she can no longer say with St. Paul, 'To die is gain.' Now she can no longer pass through the world as if she belonged not to it. She must cling to him whose name she bears; she must follow his steps; she must watch his eyes;

> 'She must pour her heart's rich treasures forth,
> Although unrepaid for their priceless worth;'

for he is the father of her child; and what God has thus joined together, nothing in Heaven or on earth can put asunder. But who stands between her and her husband? Whose eyes draw away the glances that should be fixed on hers? Whose ears hear and tolerate the words of love which should be hers alone? Do you see the girl that holds her hand, and leans on the back of the couch where she sits? One hair of her unworthy head is more dear to that infatuated man, than all the matchless beauty, the sacred purity, the unstained affection of his young wife. Look at that other woman, whose eyes are fixed with such tender and ardent affection on the same girl, whose childhood she has blessed, whose youth she has watched over, and on whose head she has heaped blessings without end; in whose existence she has centred all the happiness of her own. *That* girl, with that very hand which has been so often and so fondly kissed by a childless mother; *that* girl (cursed be her anger, for it was fierce, and her wrath, for it was cruel!) hurled to a watery grave the only child of that devoted friend, of *that more than* mother; and there she sits by the side of her whom *she has made* childless; and she holds the hand of the wife whose

husband adores her, and whose love she dares not check; there she sits, as if a mine was not ready to spring under their feet; and even now a smile is on her face, for some gay remark has been addressed to her, and, like the Indian at the stake, she must die before she writhes, and must look upon the deeds she has done, and the pangs she endures, as if her nerves were of iron, and her heart of stone."

A servant came up-stairs to tell Alice that her husband was waiting for her in the carriage, and a moment after she was gone Edward announced to us that everything was settled about his standing for the county, and that he should start at six o'clock the next morning for Elmsley. "Lovell will go with me," he added; "he has not been well lately, and thinks the change of air will do him good." And turning to Mrs. Middleton, he continued, "Henry promises to help me in canvassing, and as neither you nor Ellen can be with me, his eloquence will be invaluable. You do not think Mrs. Lovell will be annoyed at his going?"

"Not at all," answered Mrs. Middleton; "and we will ask her to come and stay with us here during your and Henry's absence. How long will it be do you suppose?"

"Not more than three or four days, I should imagine; and now I must consult you upon a plan which my uncle and myself have formed, but for which we require your sanction, and Ellen's consent. The election will take place in about a fortnight, exactly the time we had fixed upon for our marriage; Lawson has just told us that the settlements could without much difficulty be got ready by this day week; and if we were married on that day, we could go and spend a week at Hillscombe, and then join you at Elmsley, where my uncle is quite determined to go for the election."

My aunt was preparing to make some objections to this plan, when Mr. Middleton came into the room, and by assuming that it was thus settled, and declaring that any further discussion of it was unnecessary, put a stop to the conversation. Edward took me into the next room, and asked me if I had any objection to the arrangement. As I saw by his face that he would be exceedingly annoyed *if I did object, I expressed* my perfect readiness to agree to *it. He seemed altogether so* much pleased and excited, that my

self-tormenting disposition immediately suggested to me, that politics interested him more than anything else, and that no one day since our engagement had he appeared so satisfied and so cheerful. I was also foolish enough to be annoyed at his seeming so thoroughly reconciled to Henry; I felt a kind of vague irritation at Henry's accompanying him on this journey, and the more his spirits rose, the more mine fell. As I did not seem to take much interest in his electioneering concerns he dropped the subject, and began to talk of Alice, whose beauty and manners he warmly praised. "You do not think that Henry appreciates her, do you?"

"Who can tell," I exclaimed, "when a woman is appreciated? Once secure in the affection he has inspired, a man's love often waxes wondrous cool." As I said this I had what the French call "des larmes dans la voix."

Edward fixed his eyes on the ground and knit his brows, but after a moment looked up into my face and said, "How well Lovell knows you!"

I coloured, and asked him what he meant.

"I heard him say one day that it was difficult to tell if you felt what you acted, or acted what you felt."

This severe sarcasm cut me to the heart, and to have Henry quoted against me by Edward, was more than I could bear. Pride and anger struggled for a moment with grief in my breast, but were soon conquered by it. I must have looked intensely unhappy, for Edward took my hand in his, and drawing me kindly to him, said, "My dearest love, I did not mean to vex you."

"If you had you would have succeeded," I answered with bitterness. "No, Edward," I continued, passionately; "from you I can bear everything. Reprove me as often and as severely as you please; treat me harshly when I deserve it; I shall never be weary of *your* reproof, nor complain of *your* severity; but that you should allow Henry to influence you against me — that you should quote his sarcasms and call them truth, even when their object is to make you doubt the reality of my feelings, the sincerity of my affection —"

Edward got up, and walked up and down the room; his countenance was more disturbed than it had yet been at any time since

our engagement. At last he stopped before me, and after looking at me in silence for a few minutes, he said, "You are a spoilt child, my Ellen, in the fullest sense of the word. Your life has been too happy" — (Good God! was *that* the conclusion he had come to?) — "you have known nothing of the real trials of life, or you would not take pleasure in creating them for yourself. Believe me, Ellen, do not plant unnecessary thorns in a path where they will spring up but too naturally. What is there wanting to your happiness *now?* Is not our mutual love as strong as ever? Is not my whole soul devoted to you? In a few days you will be my wife, and when I promise to love and cherish you until death shall part us, it will be no empty vow that will pass my lips, but a solemn pledge which my whole life shall redeem. But do not expect from me the language of romance, the cant of sentiment; I look upon you as the dearest and most precious treasure that was ever consigned to a man's keeping, but not as an idol before which I must bow. I must stengthen you with my strength, rather than yield to your weakness; in my very harshness, Ellen, there is a tenderness which you may trust in, for though it may sometimes wound, it will never fail you."

Penitent and subdued I listened in silence to Edward's words. Earnestly and humbly I pressed his hand to my heart, and when we parted that night I felt that though I feared him more, I loved him also with a more solemn tenderness and a deeper reverence than ever.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"'T is done * * * * the fatal vow
Has passed my lips! Methought in those sad moments,
The tombs around, the saints, the darkened altar
And all the trembling shrines with horror shook."

TANCRED AND SIGISMUNDA.

THE following morning, when Henry came to breakfast with Edward previous to their departure, Mrs. Middleton had a long conversation with him. She proposed to him that Alice should come and stay with us during his absence. He gladly accepted this offer, *and wrote a line to his* wife recommending her to do so *in a way that left her no option.*

Edward had left me in a state of mind which made Alice's society very acceptable to me; my spirits were subdued, and Henry's absence removed the restless irritation which I usually felt in his presence. My time was taken up in a great measure by the number of little occupations which my approaching marriage occasioned. Presents came pouring in daily from relations and friends; I had also to answer letters of congratulation, and all the business of that great change in one's existence was in the full tide of activity.

The second morning after Edward's departure, I asked Alice to go with me to a shop in St. James's-street, where I wanted to buy a present for Mrs. Hatton. We set out together, but as the day was fine and not too hot for walking, we resolved to go first into Hyde Park. The dusty burnt-up grass was still pleasanter to tread upon than the broad flag-stones; and there was a breeze that felt pure and refreshing to lungs that had been obliged for so long to inhale the foggy atmosphere of London. Alice was talking more eagerly than usual; and when she mentioned Henry, there was an expression in her lovely face which I had never seen in it before. As we were speaking of the probable day of Edward's return, she drew from her pocket the note which Henry had written to her that morning, and holding it out to me she said, "You see *he* talks of coming back on Friday." The note was a kind one, and by the way in which she read it over, as I gave it back to her, and then folded it carefully and replaced it in her bosom, I could see the pleasure it had given her. As we entered the Green Park, I saw a man who seemed to me to be watching us. There was something in his figure and in the way in which his head was set on his shoulders, which seemed not new to me; but I did not look back long enough to ascertain this, and only walked faster from the suspicion that we were followed. On turning out of the gate of the park into Piccadilly I gave another glance, and saw the man in question standing by the side of the basin with his eyes fixed on the water. As we went on towards St. James's-street, I saw him once again, walking in a parallel line with us *on the other side* of the street. After a while he disappeared, and *I concluded that* the whole thing was accidental. We entered the

jeweller's shop and were busily engaged in examining several brooches, among which I was to choose one for my present, when on turning to show one which took my fancy to Alice, whose back was to the door, I saw against one of the panes of the shop-window the face of the man who had followed us, and whom I now recognised as that cousin of Alice's whom I had seen at Salisbury and once again at Brandon; but who Henry had given me to understand had left England for America some months before. I gave an involuntary start and turned my head away, for there was something very dark and unpleasant in this man's countenance. Alice perceived nothing, gave me her advice about the brooch, and when I had taken and paid for it we prepared to go. I gave a hurried glance towards the window; the man was gone, and I breathed more freely. We walked out of the shop, and I debated with myself whether there could be any harm in questioning Alice about this person, and in telling her that he had been dodging us in this strange manner. While I was hesitating about it we had arrived at the turning into Berkeley-street. Suddenly Alice drew her arm out of mine and turned abruptly round. She gazed intently for a moment down Piccadilly, and then turning to me she said, "I thought I had seen my cousin, Robert Harding. It was foolish of me to imagine it," she added, smiling, "for he is at New York. What strange fancies one has sometimes!"

"Who is Robert Harding? Your cousin, did you say?"

"Yes; the son of James Harding, my uncle."

"What sort of man is he?"

"I know him very little. I have scarcely spoken to him since we have been both grown up; but he was very fond of me when I was a little girl, and I have always felt a kindness for him."

"Were you brought up together?"

"Oh, no; when I was about eight years old the scarlet fever was in our house, and I was sent to my uncle's for two or three weeks. Robert was then twelve years old; he was called a very naughty boy, and nobody liked him or said a kind word to him. The first day I came there he asked me to play with him, and I was going to *say yes, when my* aunt called out, 'Don't play with *him, Alice, — don't speak to him*; he is in disgrace, and nobody

must talk to him.' He scowled dreadfully and walked out of the room. In the evening I was dressing my doll in a room up-stairs, where I was to sleep with Anne Harding, when I heard somebody sobbing in the next room. I went on tip-toe to the door and opened it gently. I saw Robert sitting on a bed and crying bitterly. Anne had told me he never cried, not even when his father beat him; but he was crying now, and I stood looking at him till I began to cry too. At last he got up, and climbing on the bed, he pulled off his handkerchief and tied it to the post. I did not know what he was doing, but he looked so odd and so red in the face, that I felt frightened, and called out 'Robert.'

"He turned round and said, 'What are you doing there? Go away, you must not see what I am about to do.'

"'It must be something very wrong then,' I said, 'and I hope you won't do it.'

"'Why not?' he muttered. 'What's it to you? I'm going to hang myself; but you must not tell, for they'd come and cut me down and punish me very much.'

"'Perhaps they would,' I said; 'but not so much as God will punish you if you do such a wicked thing.'

"'It isn't wicked,' he answered. 'Nobody loves me or cares about me. They won't let you play with me, and, perhaps, when I've hanged myself, they'll be sorry for it.'

"'But I'm sorry for you *now*,' I cried; 'and though I must not play with you while you are naughty, I will play with you and love you very much if you are good.'

"'Are you sure you will?'

"'Quite sure, Robert.'

"'Well, if you do I don't much care who doesn't. But mind if you don't love me I'll hang myself.'

"'But I will, indeed,' I said; and all the time I staid at my uncle's, Robert was very good, and we played every day together. After I went home again I did not see him very often. When he came to us he always brought me some little present of his own *making; and* he had a great turn for cutting things in wood with *his knife*. About three years ago he made my grandmother angry,

I don't know how, but she would not let him come and see us any more."

"And he is now in America?" I asked.

"Yes," replied Alice. "My grandmother told me he was gone to New York a few days before I was married. I should have liked to have said good-bye to him. How like that man in Piccadilly was to him!"

We reached home just as Alice said this; and I felt glad that I had not told her that the man she had seen must have been the same who had dodged us, and that it could have been no other than this Robert Harding, whose countenance had remained indelibly impressed on my mind; but I resolved at the first opportunity to tell Henry of this circumstance, for I felt afraid of this man, and anxious to know whether his return to England was a secret to the rest of his family as well as to Alice.

When the post came in the next morning, we received letters from Elmsley. Edward's to me was kind and affectionate, but short and hurried. He had written a long one to my uncle, full of all the details connected with his canvass, which promised to be very successful. One phrase in this letter particularly attracted my attention: — "Henry's exertions in my behalf, and anxiety for my success, are beyond what I could have expected even in the early days of our friendship. He is most amiable and agreeable; and when I compare his destiny to mine (much as it may have been his own imprudence that ruined his prospects), I feel that there is generosity in the warm attachment which he shows me. We shall be in town on Saturday, and I hope and trust that nothing will prevent our marriage taking place on Monday, as we *must* be here again at the beginning of the ensuing week; and *one week*, at least, I must have for Ellen and for Hillscombe, before I plunge again into all the business and excitement of the election."

Henry's letter to his sister was as follows: —

[I have never known or understood how Mrs. Middleton came to give me this letter to read. She handed it to me with several others, which had reference to my marriage; and I imagine that *it must have slipped among* the rest unawares to her. I returned

the whole packet to her without making any observation upon it, and she made none either.]

"My dear Mary,

"Can you understand me when I say that I retain a livelier sense of the loveliness of those scenes which are connected in my mind with acute sorrow (provided they be beautiful in themselves), than of those where I have only known happiness? Or does this seem to you nonsense? There is a spot in the world where I once stood for a quarter of an hour alone, suffering so intensely, that even now, when I think of it, I wonder how, at the end of that time, I could meet the eyes of others as I did, and show no outward signs of the anguish I was enduring. Well, Mary, strange as it may seem to you, there is not another spot in the world, the natural beauties of which are so indelibly stamped on my recollection, or which seem to have so entered into my soul. I never feel so much the unalterable beauty and perfect harmony of the material world as when the moral world within me is shaken to pieces and leaves me not even a reed to lean upon. It is the same with music. Once, when a fearful struggle was going on within me, and (no matter whether right or wrong) I thought myself very near death, an organ in the street played a Scotch air which I had heard a thousand times before; but *then*, for the first time, I understood it. Each note had a meaning, each modulation had a sense, which has never been lost to me since. Suffering and emotion are necessary (I believe it firmly) to expand our faculties in every line, and, with our powers of comprehension, increase our powers of admiration. I shall never feel the real beauty of military music, or the full sense of the muffled roll of the drum, till it leads me to battle, or marshals me to execution. Is it the same with my affections? Perhaps it is. Perhaps it is not in my nature passionately to love where I have never suffered. Perhaps if it had been my fate, after having from the days of childhood formed to myself an ideal image of what my soul could worship; after having met with the realisation of that dream of my fancy — a realisation *as much more* beautiful, as much more enchanting as life is *superior in its most* perfect form to the highest stretch of genius in

the painter; if it had been my fate, after having watched, and followed, and loved, and doated on this woman during a year, which seemed to me but as an hour, so great was the love I bore her; had it been my fate to possess her, to call her mine, perhaps I should only have been, after a while, very fond of her, as men are of their wives — very glad to find her at home, after a day spent in the House of Commons, at one time of the year, or in shooting, at another. She might only have been one object to me among many others. It might have been so, though it is difficult to believe it; but we must believe what we see, nor dare to assert that the idol enshrined in our heart in hope, in fear, and in suffering, would have maintained its sway in the dull atmosphere of secure possession.

"We arrived at Elmsley on a lovely evening, and not a room in the house, not a spot in the grounds did I leave unvisited. While Edward and Lawson were engaged on the county registers and reports, as if their whole souls were bound up in them, I stood on the verandah, and looked on each well-known object in that lovely view till the whole was wrapt in darkness. That gradual obscuring of each spot which, when I first stood there, was glowing in the light of the evening sun, reminded me of my last conversation with you, when, in answer to the confession you extorted from me, you took up a book from your table and pointed to these lines, which I only read once, but have remembered ever since: —

> 'Nay, rather feel thy melting heart
> To act the martyr's sternest part;
> To watch, with firm unshrinking eye,
> Thy darling visions as they die;
> Till all bright hopes and hues of day
> Have faded into twilight gray.' — *Christian Year.*

"But enough of all this. Our canvass has been eminently successful; Edward has exerted himself amazingly. On the nomination-day he really spoke admirably. It is impossible not to be struck with his strong sense, his uncompromising rectitude and steady moral decision of character. He is so animated, too, by all these subjects; *quite enthusiastic*, in his way, about the *interests of the people*, and the new field of exertion which his pre-

sent prospects open to him. It is plain that he has a genius more fitted for active than for contemplative life, — and so much the better for him; for a man, this is the happiest of dispositions: and he will be happy; for there is nothing in his character incompatible with quiet enjoyment; no violent passions and feelings; no morbid sensibility; with him all is sober, practical, and rational.

"Good-bye, my dear Mary. I am happy to think that Alice is with you. Remember what you promised me; watch over her as you would over a flower which a breath might sully or a breeze destroy. Thank God, you and I are no longer strangers to each other's thoughts and hearts.

"Your ever affectionate brother,

"H. Lovell."

Could Mrs. Middleton have intended me to see this letter? Had she, perhaps, promised Henry to show it me? No, this was entirely, utterly impossible. It must have been a mistake; and I would not inform her of it, lest it should agitate and distress her. Henry had evidently imparted to her the secret of his unconquerable attachment to me. Was this wise in his own interest? Did it correspond with his usual caution, and, above all, with his recent behaviour? It seemed to me strange; but Mrs. Middleton was easily worked upon: she did not know Henry as I knew him; she thought him like herself; and, because their minds were in unison, she fancied their hearts were alike. His power was so great over those who loved him, when he chose to exert it, that it seemed to me, now, as if he had taken up a new position, and, through his wife and his sister, meant to rivet the chain which bound us together. Never did two people know each other as well as Henry and myself. I always read his motives through the veil which he flung over them, and which, perhaps, concealed them sometimes from himself. He was a practical artist; his own life was the canvass on which he worked; and that was the reason why, with a selfish heart and an unprincipled mind, he possessed all *the graces of emotion*, all the charms of feeling. This letter (clever *and well aimed* as it was — for it touched upon the very wound

which had been rankling in my heart during the last few days) failed in its object, if, indeed, he had hoped that it would meet my eyes; for, as I read his account of Edward — as I felt the pain it was meant to inflict — as I acquiesced in the truth of some of his remarks, and indignantly repelled others, the cry of my heart, as I threw it from me, was in these words: "Rather be *his* slave than *your* idol."

On the following Saturday they both returned to London, and when I found myself again with Edward, I forgot everything in the joy of the moment. But when I was told that the day of our marriage was positively fixed for the following Monday, it seemed to me as if it was the first time that I had really believed it would take place, as if I had never considered before all that that step involved. For the first time I thought of what it would be to one in my peculiar situation, not only to love as I had long done, but to be bound by irrevocable ties to one who, ignorant of all the circumstances of my miserable fate, would wonder over each inequality of spirits I betrayed, condemn every tear I shed, read every letter I received, and, at the slightest appearance of equivocation or deceit, would banish me from his heart, and overwhelm me with his just anger. But it was *too late*, I said to myself — too late to retract, too late to think. I mentally closed my eyes, and passed through the next twenty-four hours like some one walking in his sleep.

On the next day (Sunday) I saw Henry for one moment as we were walking out of church. I told him, in a low voice, of Robert Harding's appearance in the parks on the last Wednesday, and of his following us through the streets.

"*You* saw him," he exclaimed. "Then it was not Alice's fancy?"

"No, no — I could swear to him. He had followed us, and stood at the shop-window long before Alice observed him."

Henry looked extremely discomposed, and muttered something to himself; then turning to me, he said —

"That fellow has been desperately in love with Alice for years — since she was quite a child. Her grandmother turned him out of the *house on that account* three years ago. Just before *our marriage took place*, he made some outrageous scenes; I

threatened to give him into custody, and warned Mrs. Tracy that I should do so. Two or three days after, she told me he had sailed for America, and from that day to this I had heard nothing more about him; but I must find out if she knows of his return. Perhaps she employs him as a spy. I shall let you know what I hear."

After a pause, I said, with a great effort—

"You must not write to me on any account; remember that, Henry. Edward will read all my letters; he is already in the habit of doing so."

"It was exceedingly foolish of you not to object to it. Pray, how am I to communicate with you if anything should occur to make it desirable? Is your maid to be trusted?"

I coloured with anger and with shame, and gave Henry a look of indignant reproach.

"I really beg your pardon if this offends you; but it is not for my own sake that I ask the question. You yourself employed a third person when you required my assistance."

"I was not married then, Henry; and deceit, contemptible as it always is, was not as guilty as it will henceforward be. For God's sake, spare me the shame of a secret correspondence. You need not be afraid of my being too happy, or of my forgetting that you hold my fate in your hands."

"Do not impute to me as a crime, Ellen, that, unfortunately, *your* safety depends on *my* conduct. I have exercised the greatest control over myself lately, and I had hoped that you would have done justice to my motives."

As he said this we had reached the door of our house, and anxious not to part with him in anger, I whispered to him, as we shook hands—

"I do you justice, Henry. Forgive, and spare me!"

He wrung my hand and walked away, without waiting for his wife, who had gone into the house with Mrs. Middleton.

Mr. Lovell, who was at that moment calling on my uncle, took her home in his carriage. When I heard my aunt arrange with *them at what hour* they were to be at church the next day, and ask *them to come* home to luncheon afterwards, I stood by in a sort

of stupified bewilderment. I then went into the back drawing-room, and wrote a note to Mrs. Hatton, to ask her to be present at my marriage the next day. As I was finishing it my aunt came in, and tried on the wreath of orange flowers, and the veil which she had chosen for me.

I walked up and down the room — I stood at the window — I wished that Edward would come; I was getting frightened at my own nervousness. I went to the pianoforte, and sang Mrs. Hemans's "Two Voices," that cry of alternate mournful depression, and highly-wrought enthusiasm, in which the words and the music seem to be but the expression of one thought. My voice was unnaturally loud and thrilling; there was a sound in it which I could not bear. A moment afterwards I was desired to go to my uncle in the library; Edward was with him, and Lawson, the man of business. I was directed to sign some papers. I did so, and Lawson left the room. My uncle then said to me —

"On you, Ellen, and on Edward, I have settled all my property. Since the day that I lost my only child this has been my fixed purpose. I was anxious to live long enough to see it accomplished, and I am thankful that wish has been granted. I have one request to make to you both. Call your eldest girl *Julia* — make her wear this chain — it was round my child's neck when she died — and if I live, let me see her often. Now go, and God bless you both!"

I don't know what I said or did; these words fell like burning lead on my soul, and I almost sank on the ground. Edward took me out of the room; and the only hour of relief which that day afforded was when, with his arm around me, and my head on his shoulder, he suffered me to weep in silence.

.. Then he raised my head gently but forcibly; then, with his sweet smile, and his low deep voice, he whispered to me that his happiness was unutterable — his love boundless — his soul mine for ever. His words — words of passion from him whom I worshipped — at whose side I felt myself unworthy to live — at whose feet I would have been content to die; — those words, those looks, *those tones, thrilled* through my whole frame, and *wrought on my brain, turning* remorse for the past, and fear for

the future, into a delirious dream of joy, even as laudanum can change pain itself into ecstacy.

I dreamed that night that I was in church, and that everything was prepared for my marriage. We stood before the altar, and the priest opened the book for the marriage service; but as he began, it was the burial service that he read. They stopped him, and he turned the pages; but ever as he began again to read, the same words came to his lips, and the book in his hands grew larger and larger, and the words, "For the Burial of the Dead," stood out in bloody letters, and seemed to rise from the page. I looked up into the priest's face, and that was changing too. I had seen those features before; but I knew them not till the thin lips moved, and said — "Julia's murderer — Julia's murderer!" And then the book and the altar were gone, and a coffin stood in its place; and the same voice said, "Open it!" — and the lid rose, and there was a corpse in its shroud. It lifted itself up slowly, and I could not see the face; but I cried out in terror "Who is it?" and the grave-clothes fell — it was Alice! I closed my eyes and shrieked; and the same voice said, "Look again — look again!" I looked, and it was Edward. Over and over again, during that night, I awoke in speechless terror; and when I went to sleep again, the same dream, with slight variations, haunted me anew.

The last time I woke, Mrs. Middleton was standing by my bed-side; and as she pressed me to her heart, I clung to her convulsively, and repeated wildly, "Save me — save me!"

"From what, my child?" she whispered — "from what? Speak to me, Ellen. One word only; and at whatever cost it may be, it shall be done. Is it possible you do not love Edward?"

"O, too much! only too much!" I exclaimed, and burst into an agony of tears. Mr. Middleton seemed relieved — assured me I was only very nervous — gave me something to drink, which calmed me — and stayed with me while I dressed.

We sat down to breakfast, and Edward soon arrived; he remarked my paleness, and spoke to me with a tenderness which *brought again into* my eyes the tears which I had resolutely *repressed during* the last hour. The time drew near, and I was

taken to my room to put on my wedding-gown. By the time I was dressed, and the whole of the family were gathered together to look at me, and blessings were pronounced, and good wishes were uttered, and kisses were given, I had become quite calm again.

I had gone through so much that the power of emotion seemed almost worn out, and I felt as if I had grown callous and cold. We drove to church, and I looked quietly out of window while my hand was locked in Mrs. Middleton's. I saw two or three acquaintances as we drove along, and read the names on the shops that we passed, with that kind of mechanical attention which fixes our eyes without occupying our thoughts.

When we came into the vestry of — church, there were a number of people in it, — all my relations, and some friends. My eyes sought out Henry; he was speaking to Mrs. Brandon; and, except that he was much flushed, there was nothing unusual in his appearance. Alice was standing by him. Mr. Middleton came for me, and the door of the vestry was opened. We walked up to the altar. The clergyman was already there, with the open book before him. I felt as if I was dreaming again. I trembled violently, and my teeth struck against each other. My aunt, Alice, and Henry, took their places on one side of the altar, and the rest of the people sat down in the surrounding pews. The clergyman bent forward and beckoned to my uncle, who went up to speak to him. At that moment I heard a step behind us, and somebody passed on Edward's side. I looked up, and saw a tall woman in deep mourning, and with a veil over her face, take her place in a pew which was nearly opposite to me. A vague terror seized me, and I could not take my eyes off this person. When everybody rose at the beginning of the opening exhortation, she remained sitting, till, when the priest said these words — .

"Therefore, if any man can show any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak or else hereafter for ever hold his peace."

She slowly *rose, drew back her* veil, and fixed her eyes upon me; *her thin lips moved as I had* seen them move in my dream, and

she seemed about to speak. I gave a hurried glance of despair at Henry; our eyes met, and then mine were rivetted to the ground, and my limbs and my heart seemed turned to stone. I *felt* that woman's gaze upon me. I knew that at the close of the exhortation she sat down, and that she rose again when the clergyman said —

"Who gives this woman to be married to this man?"

When Mr. Middleton took my hand and placed it in Edward's, the sound of a groan reached my ears; and when I raised my eyes, and, for the second time, fixed them by a kind of fascination on those malignant features and glassy eyes, they glared upon me with an expression which I cannot describe, and hardly dare to recall. The service went on, and when we knelt down to pray, while my face was buried in my hands, I heard the sound of receding footsteps; I looked up; she was gone, but I felt that she had cursed me as she went.

The ceremony was concluded. I was Edward's wife. I rose from my knees and looked about me. Henry was gone. Alice was pale, and her eyes were full of tears; she, too, was like what I had seen in my dream. We went into the vestry and signed some papers. As I was stepping into Edward's chariot to drive home again, a paper was thrust into my hand: I took it mechanically, and held it unconsciously in my clenched hand. I smiled when Edward spoke to me, and looked at him with inexpressible affection when he drew me to him, and called me his wife — his own beloved wife!

We arrived in Brook-street, and I went to dress for the journey. They brought me some biscuits and wine and water. I drank some hastily, but could not eat. Mrs. Middleton gave me her last kiss, and my uncle took me down to the carriage. I stepped into it, and Edward after me. The door was closed. I opened mechanically the paper in my hand; it contained these words — "Your sin shall find you out." I crumpled it again, and flung it out of window. I talked fast and eagerly to Edward. After an hour or two I fell into a heavy sleep. When we reached Dashminster, I awoke in a burning fever. Edward carried me up-

stairs, and laid me on a bed. I grew delirious, and raved all night. They bled me, I believe, and in two days I was better, and able to proceed to Hillscombe.

CHAPTER XIX.

"We take fair days in winter for the spring."
YOUNG'S NIGHT THOUGHTS.

"O how this spring of love resembleth
The uncertain glory of an April day,
Which now shows all the beauty of the scene,
And by and by a cloud takes all away."
SHAKSPEARE.

EDWARD, I kneel to you in spirit while I write this record of our married life. By all the trembling hope I feel that a day may come, not of mercy, but of justice — a day when, though you will not forgive me, yet you will believe in me — when, though you will not open your arms to me, yet you will say, "She was false, but not false to me." By this hope I gather strength to write. But as I pace up and down my narrow room, or lay my head on the marble slab, the only cold place it can find, dare I think of what *has* been, of what is not? Shall I not go mad, and in my madness shall I not accuse you, Edward? Shall I not tell God and man, that you have shut your heart against me, and broken mine? And on the day of judgment, will not God ask you what you have done with her, who, however guilty, was guiltless to you? Oh, deeply loved and deeply mourned, ever absent from my sight, ever present to my thoughts! lord of my bosom's love, object of its idolatry, I do not accuse you. If a fallen spirit banished from Heaven ever mourned over his fall, without a murmur for the past or a hope for the future, his feelings are like mine, when in my solitude I think that once you loved me and called me yours.

Can it be that such things are and pass away, and leave no traces behind them, save broken hearts and mental agonies? Does Nature, while it rejoices with those who rejoice, never weep with those who weep? Does the sun shine as brightly on the forest glades of *Hillscombe as when I* wandered through them with Edward? *Does the stream dash* through them with the same reckless

joy as when he helped me over its mossy stones? Is the thyme as sweet, is the heather as purple, as when by his side I scrambled over its wild moors? And thyself, Edward, thyself — art thou as strong, as beautiful, as stern as ever? Hast thou driven me from thy side, and when the first anguish of that hour was gone by, hast thou said, "The bitterness of death is past," and raised again thy stately head in its beauty and its pride?

Is joy more sacred than grief, or is it so strange to the human heart that, when present, we dare not scan its fleeting form, nor recall its image when it is past. One short dream of bliss was mine; it stands alone in a life, which, though not long in years, has been long in sorrow. Once the cup has been raised to my lips; one draught I took of that for which my soul longs with a burning and quenchless thirst. Happiness! yes, happiness; one hour of which reveals to us what an eternity of bliss can be; for time and space, beginning and end, are as though they were not, in that intense life of the soul.

For seven days the sun rose in cloudless majesty; for seven days he sunk to rest "in one unclouded blaze of living light." Sunshine streamed on the grassy hills; it gilded the fields of ripening corn; it pierced into the depths of the forest; it bathed the world in light, and gladdened the heart of man. And I too, for a while, was glad; in the fierce fever which for some hours had robbed me of my senses, the anguish of my soul seemed to have passed away. Nothing was changed in my fate, but I felt weak, and there is something in weakness which resembles peace; and in the love which we give to man, when it is entire and undivided, there is a power which is strong for good or for evil, as the hand of the master wields it.

We were alone; no familiar faces — no accustomed objects reminded me of myself — of that self which had so struggled, so sinned, and so suffered. I gazed on the beautiful works of God; I raised my eyes from the green sward on which we trod, to the soft blue sky, and my soul was melted within me. I listened to Edward's words, and in that blessed solitude nothing disturbed the *silent echo* which his voice of music left upon my ear. As I closed *my eyes in sleep*, I blessed him; as I opened them again I beheld

him; and when he knelt in prayer, I knelt too, and said, "God be merciful to me a sinner!"

"Ellen, my love, shall you be ready to set off at nine to-morrow? We must be at Elmsley by six. — In tears, Ellen? What is the matter, my love? Now, really, this is childish."

"I cannot bear to go — I cannot bear to leave this place. I shall never return to it if I leave it now. In the murmur of the river — in the songs of the birds, in the rustling of the leaves, there has been all day a voice of lamentation which has haunted me; something mournful which has sounded to me like an eternal adieu. I have tried to exclude these thoughts, but they return in spite of me; and when you spoke of going, your words —"

"My dearest Ellen, I really cannot listen to such absurd nonsense. You know how much I admire your love of the beauties of nature — how much I appreciate your eloquence in describing them; but when all this degenerates into sentimentality, I own I cannot stand it."

"Dearest Edward, for you everything in nature wears a smile, and I thank God that it is so. You have never had cause to shrink from what is pure and bright and beautiful, with an aching heart and a self-accusing spirit."

As I raised my eyes to Edward's face, I was startled at its expression. There was a sternness in it which made me tremble.

"Ellen," he said, "listen to me, and mark my words. Either a morbid sensibility, which I despise, or a mawkish affectation, which I detest, injures the tone of your mind, and the truth of your character. Never let me hear again of wounded spirits, and self-reproaches, and poetic sufferings. When you were a girl you almost frightened away my love for you by these mysterious exclamations, and I hate the very sound of them. Do not let me hear that my wife cannot look upon the face of nature with a calm and hopeful eye, or on her past life with a self-approving conscience. I know there is no reality in such language, God knows, I should not speak so calmly if I could suppose there was; but as you value my love, or dread my anger, never use expressions again which *in your mouth* are senseless."

"You are severe," I said, with an attempt at a smile, which

made my mouth quiver; "your wife should indeed be perfect, for it is evident that her faults would meet with no mercy from you."

"You think me harsh, Ellen? Perhaps I am. But look here; there are four lines in this book (and he took up a volume of Metastasio's plays which was lying on the table), which make up, in my opinion, for all the sentimental nonsense it contains." He pointed to these lines:

"La gloria nostra
E geloso cristallo, e debil canna
Ogni aura ch'inchina, ogni respiro ch'appanna."

"My feelings are, perhaps, exaggerated, but I own it fairly to you. I can conceive that, as a woman's reputation might suffer from trifles light as air, so a man's love might vanish from what would appear but a slight cause for such an effect. You were about to speak, Ellen, and you have checked the words that were rising to your lips, but I read them in your eyes, and I will answer them. It is not because my love is weak, that a fault in you would seem to me as a crime in another. It is because, to discover that you were not pure and good and true, beyond any other woman in the world, would be so dreadful to me, that I doubt if in that overthrow of all my pride and my happiness, my love could survive. My pride, I say, as well as my happiness, for I *am* proud of you, my beloved wife, when I look at your dark eyes — at your clear brow — at your curling lip, and feel that no word has ever passed those lips which an angel might not have uttered, nor any eye has ever been raised to yours but with respect and affection. They are glorious gifts, Ellen, precious treasures which you possess — an innocent mind and a spotless reputation. Beware how you accustom yourself to talk, for effect, of remorse and self-reproach. They are too dark and too bitter things to be trifled with."

"True," I answered, "they *are* too dark and too bitter subjects for us to discuss. You are right. Forgive me my folly. I shall not fall again into the same error."

And back into the deepest recesses of a swelling heart were thrust regrets, fears, hopes, which were thus commanded never again to trouble the smooth surface of married life. Henceforth

ward I was ordered to stand like a painted sepulchre, in all the outward form and show of virtue, nor ever dare to utter in Edward's hearing that life was not always fair, its memories sweet, and its prospects bright. The dream was over, and its danger too, for in its happiness my soul had grown weak; it had poured forth its love, and in the rushing tide of feeling the secret of its misery was escaping it. Now the barrier was raised again — now the mental separation was begun; for as we drove out of sight of Hillscombe on the following day, with that self-command which, while the heart is aching, teaches the tongue to utter some common-place remark in an indifferent voice and careless manner, I turned to Edward and asked him some trifling question, while at that very moment burning tears stood in my eyes, and a passionate farewell was uttered in my soul.

One of the strangest feelings in life, is that of gliding into a new state of things with a kind of matter-of-course facility which we do not beforehand imagine to be possible. This struck me much, when, on the day of our arrival at Elmsley, I found myself once more seated at dinner in that well-known dining-room, in which every bit of furniture, from the picture of a certain Admiral Middleton, which stood over the chimney-piece with a heap of blue cannon-balls by his side, to the heavy, sweeping, red curtains in which I had often hid myself in a game of hide-and-seek, was as familiar to me as the face of a friend. Here, in the house where in despair I had once refused Edward, I was sitting as his bride, and bowing in return for the healths which were drunk in honour of my marriage; and Henry — Henry, who had so often threatened, upbraided, once almost cursed me — greeted me now with a smile, and the bridal nosegay of white camellias and jessamine which I held in my hand was gathered and given by him. Alice, also, the child of Bridman cottage, the tradesman's daughter, was sitting by Mr. Middleton in all the quiet dignity of her natural manner. For the first time she was dressed in an evening gown of white muslin, and a wreath of shining holly was in her hair. Mr. Middleton seemed particularly happy; he had obtained the great object of all his wishes; he had married me to Edward. Edward's return for the county was next to certain;

and such was the softening influence of this state of things that he asked Henry to drink wine with him, and nodded to him good-humouredly as he did so. Mrs. Middleton, on the contrary, looked anxious and careworn, and once or twice I saw her eyes filled with tears, as she turned them alternately upon Alice and me.

In the evening Henry spoke to me but little, and nothing could be more amiable and gentle than his manner. He carefully avoided every subject that could have been painful to me, and whatever he said was soothing. He was out of spirits, but there was no bitterness in his depression. In trifles which will not bear recital, by some scarcely perceptible change of tone, by an answer given in the right place, by a look of assent when no word was uttered, he gave what at that moment I wanted — sympathy, and that silent, constant, unobtrusive sympathy, fell like oil on troubled waters.

"Does she like Elmsley?" I asked, as Alice sat opposite to us, earnestly reading a book which she had just taken out of the bookcase.

"I hardly know. The kind of life she leads here, quiet as it seems to us, is so new to her that I fancy it almost oppresses her. She has not been quite like herself since she came here. I cannot call it a cloud, but a shade has sometimes passed over her face whose expression formerly never used to vary. Do you remember the first day you ever saw her?"

"Don't I! — the old fountain and the blooming children: what a picture that was! But look at her *now;* is she not like what our fancy, aided by the loveliest conceptions of genius, presents to our thoughts, when we think of *her* whom all generations call blessed?"

I murmured in a low tone, more to myself than to him, the beautiful appellations of the blessed Virgin — "Lily of Eden — mystic rose — star of the morning!"

Henry added, in as low a voice, and without looking at me, "Notre Dame de bon secours."

I *understood* him, and acknowledged to myself the truth of his *prediction*, that there was one share in my soul which nothing

could ever rob him of, and that was that undefinable communion of thought and feeling, which an extraordinary fatality of circumstances, and a natural congeniality of mind, had created between us.

The next day there was nothing but bustle and excitement in the house, and in the neighbourhood. The polling was to begin at twelve o'clock that morning; and, at an early hour, we all drove to the town of —, to take up our quarters for the day in the drawing-room of the inn which belonged to my uncle, and the landlord of which was one of Edward's staunch supporters.

The loud cries of "Middleton for ever!" the enthusiastic cheering as we drove along; the occasional groans and hisses, which were too feeble to depress our spirits; the flags; the music; the bustle; Edward's heightened colour and animated countenance; the interest felt and expressed by all those about us; the eagerness of contest; the anxiety for success; the anticipated triumph over the enemy — all this together worked me up into such a state of excitement, that I could hardly sit still in the carriage, or at the window, or forbear to shout with the shouting mob.

Henry seemed as much interested as any of us; he was continually going backwards and forwards from the poll to the inn: he won even my uncle's heart, by the look of dismay with which he brought, at one moment, the news that our antagonists were unexpectedly getting ahead of us, and the burst of joy with which, towards one o'clock on the second day, he dashed into the room with the account of Edward's triumphant return by a considerable majority. His face had worn a look of zealous anxiety during the hours when the result had been doubtful; and, not my uncle, in all the gratification of party spirit, and of successful influence; nor myself, when I saw Edward chaired and cheered, and extolled to the skies; were more intensely pleased, or more wildly gay, than Henry.

I was bent upon hearing Edward speak in the Town-hall, and insisted *upon going there* with Henry and Alice. Mr. Middleton *made some objections to this*, but I overruled them all; and soon I

found myself in a kind of gallery, which had been hastily adorned with flags and ribbons of our political and family colours.

As I bowed, in return to the bursts of cheering which greeted me, at once as a bride, and as the wife of the successful candidate; as I looked upon that dense mass of human beings, who were all vociferating the name I loved, and calling for long life to him whom I adored, — never before having witnessed a scene of popular excitement, I felt carried out of myself by the tumultuous agitation of that moment. I felt that the eyes of the multitude were upon me; and, for the first time in my life, I felt certain and glad that I was handsome.

There ran a murmur of applause through the crowd; the air was rent by cries of "Long live Middleton's bride! Long live the bride of Elmsley!" and, as Edward walked into the hall, and looked up at the gallery where I was, the smile that lighted up his features, and the earnest gaze which he fixed upon me for an instant before he began to speak, conveyed to me more than any words could have done, that the beauty which had excited the enthusiasm of the mob reigned over his heart, and captivated his proud spirit.

He began to speak: I mechanically seized Henry's hand, while I listened with breathless attention. His first words were uttered slowly; but they were well chosen, and well applied. Gradually he warmed with his subject; and, in the summary which he gave of his political opinions, there were that good sense and power of expression, which indicate a high order of eloquence — above all, there was in his countenance, and in his words, that consciousness of unsullied worth and integrity, the moral effects of which no flights of genius and no zeal of party can supply. When he spoke of responsibility and its duties, it was responsibility to God as well as to man: when he spoke of the welfare of the people and of the country, there was not a human being, private friend or political opponent, (enemies he had none,) who could not have borne witness, that each day of his life was spent in unwearied efforts for the good of others; and, therefore, *he had a right* to speak of God, for he served Him; of His church, *for he honoured* it; of his country, for he loved it; of virtue, for

he practised it; of character, for his was unblemished; of honour, for his was unstained; and among all that assembled multitude, there was not one whose hand could point to a word or deed of his, that had not made his light to shine before men, and glorified his Father in Heaven, or whose voice could have named his name as connected with aught of shame or dishonour.

"Speak on, Edward, speak on, and let all who hear you and see you to-day, feel for an instant what I spend my life in feeling, that if many have done virtuously, you excel them all." * * * * * * * * * * * * *

"Ay, that 's fine speaking for the husband of she as killed the child, and got the property!"

Was that a voice from the lowest depths of hell? Had I heard those words — and did I not fall down upon my face, and call to the mountains to fall on me, and to the hills to cover me? No; I sat on and grasped Henry's hand, and saw his deadly pale face turned to the gallery over our heads; and I heard a scuffle above, and a row beginning, and a sound of voices like the hoarse murmur of the sea when the waves are rising; then Edward's voice ceased, and loud deafening cheers rang through the building; and Henry dragged me through the crowd; and among that world of faces, and in that rushing noise, and in that hurrying to and fro, I felt as if I must eternally wander, and hear again and again those words which had curdled my blood, and sickened my heart.

"Oh, no!" I cried, as Henry carried me to the carriage, and placed me by Alice's side, "Oh, no!" I cried, regardless of her presence, and almost wild with despair, "now, my punishment is greater than I can bear. I must leave him, — I must fly, — I must hide myself for ever. I am mad. Don't you see I am mad, Henry? Don't try to stop me. She must know it — he must know it — all the world must know it now. Let me go, let me go!"

I sunk back into the carriage; and the last thing I heard, before I fainted, was Henry saying to his wife, "The excitement has been too much for her. I fear the brain fever will return."

CHAPTER XX.

"For now I stand as one upon a rock,
Environed with a wilderness of sea,
Who marks the waxing tide grow wave by wave,
Expecting ever, when some curious surge
Will, in his brinish bowels, swallow him."

SHAKSPEARE.

WHEN I opened my eyes again, my head was leaning on Alice's shoulder, and Henry was sprinkling water on my face. We were just arriving at the inn; and, half supported, half carried by Henry and Mr. Middleton, who met us at the door, I reached my own room.

At first I had no distinct recollection of what had occurred, but gradually the whole of it came back to my mind. Dreadful is that return of memory, after nature has for a while suspended the consciousness of pain. I turned with a feeling that was almost like aversion from my aunt and from Alice, who were bathing my head and hands with eau de Cologne, and offering me sal volatile and water to drink. There seemed a want of sympathy in their very kindness. I almost felt to dislike them for their ignorance of what I was enduring, and for talking of past fatigue and present rest, while I was suffering so acutely.

"I should like to be alone, and to try and sleep."

"Should you, my love? Then we will go, and leave your maid in the next room, in case you should want anything."

For a few minutes I lay in silence, feeling cold and wretched, the throbbing in my head and the ticking of the clock in the passage seeming to keep time. The faint echo of some distant cries reached my ears, and I could distinguish the words of "Middleton for ever!" I trembled and hid my face in my pillow. What would they cry out next? They shouted louder still; and my maid came in on tiptoe, and when I turned round and looked at her, she said, "I thought they would have woke you, Ma'am. They are hallooing so, because Mr. Middleton is coming home; and they are *cheering him* all the way."

Coming home! He, Edward! To me! The husband of her

who .... Oh, had he heard those words? had he noticed them? Would he repeat them? and as he did, would a sudden light flash on his brain, and the whole truth burst upon him at once? There had been a scuffle in that gallery. What was it? I must know; I must hear; I must speak to Henry.

"More shouting! more hallooing!"

"Mr. Middleton is coming in, Ma'am."

"Lock the door, and say I am asleep."

"What were you pleased to say, Ma'am?"

"Nothing, nothing. Do I look very ill?"

"Not very ill, Ma'am."

Edward came, and in a kind manner said, "My own love, I am so vexed to hear that you have been poorly. You ought not to have come. How are you now?"

"Better, dearest."

"Your aunt says you are not to talk; so now be quite still, and try to go to sleep. I am going to dinner, where I shall have to speak again. Did you like my speech this morning?"

I seized his hand, kissed it over and over again, and then pressed it upon my eyes, as I answered; "Perfect, — perfect as yourself."

He drew me fondly to him; and I whispered in his ear, "Come to Elmsley now. Do not leave me; I am weak; I am ill. Give up this dinner; I shall be miserable if you go to it. Take me back to Elmsley *now*, immediately."

"My dear love, what are you talking about? You know the thing is impossible. You can go when you like with your aunt; I shall come in the evening."

"That will not do, Edward. I entreat, I implore you not to leave me. Have I no influence with you? Have those detestable politics already so engrossed you, that my wishes, my entreaties, are vain?"

"For Heaven's sake, Ellen, do not be so foolish! Again in tears! Again a scene! This is really past endurance."

He *walked up and down* the room, while I stood by the chimney, *and with clasped hands* and streaming eyes repeated, "Scold

me; reproach me; but do not leave me! Do, do, I implore you, come with me at once to Elmsley."

At this moment my maid came in, and put a letter into Edward's hands. The direction was exactly in the same round, peculiar characters, in which the threatening words that had been twice addressed to me were written. I felt myself turning as pale as death, and then the blood rushed to my head with violence. I darted upon the letter, and in a second I had snatched it out of Edward's hand and thrown it into the fire. He looked at me for an instant in silent astonishment; and, partly to implore forgiveness, partly because I trembled so that I could not stand, I fell on my knees, and hid my face in my hands.

"What is the meaning of this, Ellen? Explain yourself immediately. Speak if you do not wish me to leave you in anger," he added, with his hand on the handle of the door.

"Oh, for God's sake, for mercy's sake, do not go *now!* do not leave me in this way!"

"Then speak!" he rejoined almost fiercely; "give some explanation of an act which I cannot understand or forgive."

"I thought — I fancied — that that letter came from some woman; — a woman who has watched you, followed you. Forgive me, Edward; I was jealous — I was mad! Oh, have pity upon me and do not drive me quite mad!"

As I said these words, I held my hand to my head, and staggered towards the bed. Edward lifted me up, placed me upon it, and kissing my forehead, said, "God help you, poor child!"

I threw my arms round his neck, and clung to him.

When he disengaged himself, and left me, I felt as if it might be for the last time; other voices, other letters might reach him; and then all my previous conduct would rise up in judgment against me. What he might once have thrown aside as the scrawl of a madman, would now appear to him in the form of an explanation. I rang the bell with violence; and when my maid came, I desired her to find Henry and send him to me immediately.

"Shall I go and tell him in the drawing-room, Ma'am?"

"*No; I will go* there myself."

I put on my bonnet and shawl, and answered all inquiries by

assurances that I was well again, and ready to drive back to Elmsley. The carriages were ordered; and calling Henry to the window, I asked him in a low voice if he had anything to tell me; if he knew anything more. He put his finger on his lip and turned away. An instant afterwards he asked me aloud if I would give up my place in the close carriage to Alice, who had a slight cold, and go with him in his. I nodded assent; and when my uncle said, as I thought sternly, "This is a very foolish plan, Ellen; you had better come with us;" I cried out that the air would do me good; and, springing in by Henry's side, drove off to Elmsley.

"What have you heard? What have you found out?"

"In the first place, tell me, have you had a scene with Edward since you came home? Has he questioned you about anything?"

"How do you mean? About what?"

"Perhaps he will take no notice; but you must be prepared with an answer if he should; and we had better talk it over together. It makes me miserable to give you pain; but you must not be taken by surprise: a letter has been sent to him, and is in his hands now, whether he has read it or not as yet."

"Who sent it? Who spoke in the gallery?"

"I believe it was Robert Harding; but I cannot be sure of it. The moment after we brought you home, I tried to find out. All I could gather was that one of the servants struck the speaker, whoever he was; that he returned the blow, and that a scuffle ensued; the police interfered, and the man slipped away. I returned to the inn; and as I was standing by the window half an hour afterwards, I saw Harding walking down the street; I went downstairs and asked your servant at the door if he knew that man, or had ever seen him before. He told me that he had just given him a letter for Edward, which he had requested should be delivered to him immediately. It must have been Harding who spoke in the gallery, and whom I saw in the street. Mrs. Tracy denied the other day all knowledge of his being in England; but I can swear to him. I asked your servant for the letter, which he must have thought strange enough, and I do not know what I could have done had he produced it; but as it was, he had given it an instant be-

fore to your maid to take up-stairs, and I have been in cruel anxiety ever since."

"That letter is destroyed."

"How? What do you mean?"

"I snatched it out of Edward's hand and burnt it. It is almost a relief to find from what this has saved me, for it was at a dreadful cost, as Edward was fearfully incensed. But, for Heaven's sake, Henry, tell me what are we to do now? Harding will write again; there is no security, no hope. This cannot last."

"Something must certainly be done, and I must find out this Harding. I am enraged with old Tracy, for having betrayed it all to him; but money, perhaps . . . Have you much at your disposal, Ellen?"

"Some, not a great deal; but I can get more, perhaps. Oh, Heavens! is it come to this: must I buy the silence of a set of wretches, as if I had indeed been a vile criminal? And what have I done after all? Good God! what have I done? Nothing that I might not proclaim to the world, with regret and sorrow indeed, but without shame or remorse."

"You should in that case have proclaimed it sooner. It is too late now."

"So you say, and so you have made me act. If it had not been for you, if I had never known you, if you had never crossed my path, I should not be the miserable creature I am now. But I am driven to extremities; sorrow and shame compass me about on every side. I can never look Edward, you, or the world in the face again, till you release me from the fatal oath which you extorted from me in an hour of weakness and of despair."

"It is from your own weakness, from your rash and foolish despair, that in spite of yourself I will guard you."

"Oh, Heaven, deliver me from such guardianship as yours! God save me from your counsels, and rescue me from your power!"

"Go, then, go, and tell your husband that you killed your cousin by mistake. Tell him that you were on the point of marrying me by mistake; that you married him by mistake; and have deceived him and me, and every one you have had to do with, all

by mistake. Go and break the most solemn engagement, which you called upon God to witness; heap fresh guilt and fresh remorse on your head; but, if Edward should not give credit to your story, and should hint at separation, remember that there is a man in the world who loves you in spite of all your scorn and your violence, and who would kneel at your feet if the rest of the world contemned and deserted you."

"Another word of this kind, Henry, and I never speak to you again."

"You forget yourself, Ellen. Poor weak woman, what could you do without me? Look at this letter, which in your difficulties you once wrote to me, when you dared not marry Edward without my consent. It never leaves me; there, in my bosom, I keep it as a charm to recall softer thoughts and better feelings when an evil spirit takes possession of me, and urges me to drive you to desperation. Have mercy on yourself, and on me, Ellen. Your present position is far more awful than it then was; but if you will be patient and trust in me, all may yet be well. I will find this Harding out, and take some means to stop his mouth. Think of all you would forego, if in one rash moment I suffered you to disclose the truth to Edward. I solemnly swear to you, that I speak the truth, when I assert that from what I know of him and of his character, and something of his past history too, I am certain that he would part from you if these circumstances were to come to his knowledge. And do you know, Ellen, what I save you from? No, you do not know what it is to *part*. You do not know what it is to give up love, and hope, and joy; never to see the face which to see is in itself happiness; not to hear the voice which to hear is to be blest; and to feel that there is life before us, life to be gone through, and no light to gild it, no music in our souls, no hopes nor even fears; and oh, how wretched is that state where even fear would seem a blessing! No, no, do not part from him you love; never feel what I have felt; but feel for me sometimes: and when you wake to-morrow, and remember that but for *me your eyes would* not be gladdened by the sight of *your husband, treasure up* that thought against the next time that

harsh words and cutting reproaches are rising to your lips against one who seeks to save you from the anguish he himself endures."

I returned the pressure of Henry's hand, and we drove on in silence for some time. He had as usual subdued and reconciled me to a return to the ordinary state of things between us. He went on to advise me strongly, and apparently with great good sense, not to oppose a speedy return to London, and to promote, instead of discouraging, the interest which Edward took in politics. "Your spirits are naturally unequal," he said; "and you have often causes for worry and anxiety. It is easy enough to command one's self for an hour or two in the course of the day; and the very joy which you will feel in Edward's society during those intervals which he will devote to you, will enable you to keep from him those alternations which must affect him in a disagreeable manner. It is impossible to say what stories this Harding may have spread in the neighbourhood, and till they have died away you will feel much more comfortable in London, where Edward will have constant occupation, and you yourself resources of all sorts for interest and amusement. A quiet life may be a good thing for those who have no cares or troubles; but when, to use a common expression, one has anything on one's mind, it is the worst possible plan of existence: it is equally difficult to shake it off one's self, or to conceal it from others, without the aid of external excitements."

In this manner Henry talked on till we reached Elmsley.

Late that evening Edward returned. He had made another excellent speech; and in order to prevent any allusion to my conduct in the morning, I questioned him about politics, and listened with apparent interest to explanations about divers party questions, and details relative to the measures expected during the next session.

During a pause, however, he said to me in a low voice, "I have made inquiries about the letter which you destroyed in so rash a manner this morning. Your groundless jealousy entirely misled you. It was left for me by a man whom nobody knew, and must have been some petition I suppose. I ought not to have *forgiven you* so easily, for it was unjustifiable to destroy a letter in

t way from some absurd suspicion; but you owned your folly frankly that it disarmed me."

I sighed deeply, but made no answer.

The next morning, at breakfast, Edward asked Henry if he w how the row had begun, which took place in the gallery ing the conclusion of his speech.

"Some one called you names, I believe," Henry carelessly wered; "and one of our people resented it. That was all."

"Do you know who it was that took up my cause in that way?" d Edward.

"Old James, the coachman, I believe," answered Henry.

Old James had known me from a baby — had taught me to e; he had always been much attached to me, and I could easily derstand his anger at the horrible imputation cast upon me; t I trembled from head to foot at the idea that in his very indig- ion he would spread the report, and, above all, that if Edward ke to him he would repeat it. I did not feel courage to speak to n myself on the subject, and, therefore, as usual, I turned to nry for assistance. I whispered to him a few words, and he mediately left the room.

"What have you sent Henry about?" my uncle asked.

The question was a simple one, but at the moment I could not d an answer to it; and as Alice fixed her large calm eyes upon , I coloured and stammered out something unintelligible about dering the horses. She looked at me steadily for an instant, d then taking up her knitting she worked on in silence. I was pying out some music, and for a quarter of an hour there was other sound in the room but the scratching of my pen and the stling of Mr. Middleton's and Edward's newspapers. When nry returned I felt to colour again, and breathed more freely ien he took up a third newspaper and sat down by the fire. After few minutes were elapsed I went to the pianoforte and began ying. Henry got up and joined me.

"All is right," he said, "about James, but the sooner you ve this place the better. There are all sorts of stories about. ey will *soon die* a natural death; but your absence would be y *desirable.*".

"Heaven knows I do not wish to stay here. But how can I make Edward and my uncle go?"

"I will try to persuade my sister, what is, in fact, true, that, if they are going abroad for this winter, they ought to be setting out now. You will naturally accompany them to London; indeed, you can make a point of it with Edward; and then, once in London, you can easily contrive to stay there. As Parliament meets at the beginning of November, your coming back here would probably be out of the question."

"Edward will wish to shoot next month."

"Then go to Hillscombe; — anywhere but *here*."

"Have you seen that man?"

"Not yet; I shall ride to Bridman this afternoon and find him out."

"What is he doing there?"

"I don't know; but James tells me he has been staying at the inn there for the last three weeks."

"Oh, that I were gone from hence! That I had the wings of a dove to flee away and be at rest! Henry, shall I ever know again what it is to be at rest?"

"Rest would not do for you. You have too keen a spirit, too strong a will, and too much genius to know what rest is. A good thing in its way I grant; but neither for you nor me was it ever decreed. We can be intensely happy, we can be intensely miserable. We tremble in the midst of joy, for we feel that it is too exquisite to last. In anguish we hope on, for we cannot conceive life without something to brighten its dull course; and we would rather die than live without a fear, a hope, an emotion of any sort."

As he said these words he fixed his eyes on his wife, who was still apparently absorbed in her work at some distance from us.

She got up at this moment and came towards us. She had a letter in her hand, which she held out to Henry, and at the same time she said distinctly and slowly, "This letter was found at the bottom of *our* carriage. It was brought to *me*, and I return it to *you*."

The delicate colour of her cheek was slightly heightened, but her voice was perfectly calm, and she walked slowly out of the

room. It was my letter to Henry, the only one I had ever written to him. He had shown it to me the day before, and now she had seen it, at least, she must have recognised the handwriting. Henry bit his lip, tore up the paper into fragments, and threw them into the fire.

He returned to me, and said in a low voice, "Would that my love, my guilty love for you, could die away like those fragments in the flame. But, Ellen, it is too late; we have sown the whirlwind, and we must reap the storm."

When I came down to luncheon, I hardly dared to look towards Alice. Never had I feared anything so much as to meet those calm and gentle eyes. She came up to me as we were leaving the dining-room, and with her sweet voice asked me if I would drive with her. I gave a hasty assent, although I dreaded beyond expression to find myself alone with her, and I was much relieved when my uncle volunteered to accompany us.

It was a fine October afternoon, and as we were driving out of the gates of the park, Mr. Middleton turned to Alice and asked her if she knew the drive by Shirley Common, and back by the Woods of Bridman.

"No," she said; "I have often walked through Bridman Woods; but I do not know the drive you mention."

"Then we will take it to-day. Drive to Shirley Common, stop when you come to Euston Gate, and come back through Bridman Woods and home by the village."

There seemed in truth to be some fatality pursuing me. I could not take a common drive without some fresh cause for anxiety; and as we proceeded in the appointed direction, I thought of the day when I had so much annoyed Henry by persisting in visiting Bridman Cottage. As we drove along the terrace where I had seen Alice for the first time, I saw her eyes fixed on the broken fountain, and her lips moved as if she was repeating something to herself. She suddenly turned to my uncle, and asked him if he would put her down at the corner of the terrace and *wait for her a few minutes*, while she went to look at the *house where she had once lived.*

"I want to see Bridman Cottage myself," answered my uncle. "I have had the offer of a tenant, and shall be glad to go over it."

He desired the coachman to drive there. As we passed the inn, I saw Henry's horse standing in the yard. I instantly turned Mr. Middleton's attention to an old oak on the other side of the road, and this circumstance escaped unobserved. When we reached the cottage, the door was opened by an old woman who had had the care of it since Mrs. Tracy had given it up. She threw open the shutters, and the slanting rays of the evening sun shone through the casement on the dusty brick floor. When we followed her into the back parlour, she opened the door into the little garden, the neat and gay appearance of which contrasted with the dirty and forlorn aspect of the cottage. A spade and a rake were lying on the grass-plot in front of it. Mr. Middleton inquired of the old woman how she managed to keep the garden in so good a state, and who she got to work in it.

"Why, Sir, if you had come some four weeks ago, you would have hardly said the same, for it 's nothing as I can do myself; and my son as comes home from a Saturday to a Monday, it 's not much that he can do either; but last month a man from Lon'on, what lives at the Crown, he came here and asked me to show him the house, and when he see'd the garden and the condition it was in, he asked me to let him set to work in it and put it to rights; and a deal he has done in it to be sure for the time. He got Madge, the washerwoman, to come over one day and tell him how it all was when them people as lived in it last were here. And a power of work he did to put up that arbour there, as she told him it was afore the neighbour's boys had got in and pulled it to pieces."

"But what is that man doing here? What is he?"

"I 'm sure I don't know, Sir; he does jobs for the carpenter sometimes, and turns a penny may be that way."

"You should not let people into the house whom you know nothing about."

"Lord, Sir! what harm can he do? There 's nothing to take *in the place*, and sure he has made the garden look gay to what *it did.*"

Mr. Middleton went to look at the cow-shed; and the old woman, turning to Alice and myself, continued, "Madge says as how he has written a name with them flowers out in that corner; but I can't say I reads it myself — it 's a queer sort of print enough."

We both moved in that direction, and saw at the same time, under the wall, traced in the delicate lilac flowers of the Virginian Stock, the name of *Alice*. She looked steadily on the spot for a few seconds, and then turning to the woman, asked her the name of the man whom she had spoken of.

"Robert Harding, Ma'am."

Alice only said, "Poor fellow! I understand it all."

She turned away and walked into the house. I leant against the wall, and remained buried in thought till my uncle returned. He was in a hurry to go, and desired me to look for Alice. Not finding her in the rooms below, I went up the narrow staircase, opened the door of what had once been her bed-room, and looked into the closet within. There was the view of the church, such as she had once shown it me from that window: she was on her knees, and her head was resting on her hands; the sound of a deep sigh caught my ear. I looked at her kneeling in that bare and empty room where I had seen her once before with her books and her flowers, her sweet and pleasant thoughts, her bright and quiet smiles. I looked on this picture and on that, and something whispered to my soul, "Who has done this?" and conscience answered, "*Thou*, even *thou*." I heard my uncle's impatient step below, and I said, "Alice, will you come?" She rose from her knees, and there was in her face that peace which passeth all understanding. She looked into mine and, doubtless, saw in it the storms which swept over my soul, for her meek eyes looked kindly upon me. She drew from her bosom a small wooden cross, which hung by a black ribbon round her neck; she held it to her lips and then to mine, and said, "Borne for us, and by us."

Dinner was half over that day before Henry came in; his face was flushed, and his brow clouded. He answered roughly and abruptly his sister's questions as to the cause of his lateness;

drank a great deal of wine, and maintained a gloomy and sullen silence. Partly from a kind of utter discouragement, partly from the fear of giving pain to Alice, instead of eagerly watching for an opportunity of speaking to him after dinner, and learning the result of his interview with Harding, I avoided Henry, and even left the drawing-room; and going up to my own turret sitting-room, I raked up the embers of the fire, and sat before it in gloomy contemplation. At the end of about half an hour, Henry burst into the room, and, as I looked at him in astonishment, he exclaimed bitterly, "Pray be so good as to dispense with forms for once, and receive me graciously if you can, for my patience is exhausted, and I would recommend you not to trifle with me. Do you imagine," he continued, with increasing violence, "that I am to submit to the most painful and humiliating interviews, and at my return to be treated as a footman whom you have sent on an errand? If you hate me, conceal it at least. Act the hypocrite once more, and to good purpose, for I am weary of the part you play, and make me play."

"Leave me, leave me this moment; and O that I might never set eyes on you again."

"So you said once before; and did I not tell you then, that all was not over between us? Are you not bound to me by a tie so powerful that nothing can sever it? Has not your heart softened to me in spite of all I have ever done or said to make you hate me? And is it not because you know, you feel, that, whatever I may do and say in ungovernable anger, I love you ardently, passionately, unspeakably —"

"For God's sake, for mercy's sake, go! that is Edward's voice in the hall — he is coming."

Henry rushed to the door and locked it; at the same moment the handle was seized and turned outside. I grew very pale, but sprang forward to open it; before I had reached it, Henry had seized my hands, and in a whisper he said, "As you value your future peace, do not open it."

"I would die at his feet rather than not let him in."

I disengaged myself from Henry's grasp, and flung open the *door; but* whoever had been there was gone, and I heard the noise

that led into the hall slammed with violence. I returned into the room burning with shame and indignation; and throwing myself down on the chair before the fire, I hid my face in my hands and refused to listen to Henry.

"Calm yourself, I entreat you," said Henry; "after this it will not do to appear again with red and swollen eyes. Besides, I *must* speak to you — I must tell you about Harding."

I got up with the courage of despair, and the recklessness of a nature that was growing hardened, and listened in silence to his recital of the scene he had had with that wild man, who seemed careless of all ties and considerations, save the one feeling which overruled all others in his strange nature — his unconquerable and hopeless attachment to Alice.

"I have borne much for your sake, to-day, Ellen; it is well for us both that I have more self-command than you have. That coarse and vulgar lout knows my secrets as well as yours; he almost threw into my face the money I offered him. He almost called me a villain, and I was forced to bear with it all, and even to let him depart with nothing but a silent curse, when he said 'Make Alice happy, and I will hold my tongue, and only thank God that though I 'm a blackguard, I 'm no thief; and though I 've knocked down many a man, I 've never killed a child; but if you bring tears into her eyes, and break her heart, my name is not Robert Harding, or there are no clubs or knives in the world, if I do not give you a taste of mine.' Now you know why I came home with the spirit of a demon and the temper of a fiend, and vented upon you the tortures I had been enduring. Oh, Ellen, we cannot bear this life much longer; if you could but —"

"Ellen! Ellen! where are you? The Brandons are arrived, and have been asking for you over and over again. Mr. Middleton and Edward wish you to come down directly."

I rushed down the steps of the turret stairs, at the bottom of which my aunt was standing, and went with her into the library, and had to talk and to smile, and to be told that I looked a little pale and tired, and to be asked by Edward if I knew where Henry *was, and to deny all knowledge* of it, and to feel as if myself and

all about me were acting a heartless play, with fevered cheeks and breaking hearts.

CHAPTER XXI.

"There was a laughing devil in his sneer,
That raised emotions both of rage and fear;
And where his frown of hatred darkly fell,
Hope withering fled, and Mercy sighed farewell."

THE CORSAIR.

FROM this day forward Henry's manner and conduct lost that degree of gentleness and consideration which had marked it since the moment that I had thrown myself on his mercy at the time of my hasty engagement to Edward. Whenever I was alone with him, he spoke of his attachment as of a matter of course; and with alternate bursts of anger and of tenderness, met every attempt I made to check or resent this: sometimes with bitter scorn he hinted that I had lost all right to do so, and asked, with a sneer, if I supposed that he was to be treated like any presumptuous admirer who happened to make love to me. In a hundred trifles he contrived to make me feel his power. He engaged me in a course of petty deceits and contrivances; he humbled me in my own eyes, and practically pointed out to me the degradation of my position, and the deterioration of my character. He held me now, indeed, completely in his power; for if I made the slightest attempt to struggle against his tyranny, he threatened to abandon Alice, and to seek in absence and change of scene, relief to the sufferings which his hopeless passion caused him. He knew well that such a project must drive me to despair, on her account as well as my own; and one evening (about a fortnight after the conversation I last recorded), when I had turned abruptly from him, and refused to accede to his usual threatening offers of reconciliation after a very violent scene, he wrote to me to announce his determination of carrying this resolution into effect. His letter was as follows:—

"Do not upbraid me — upbraid yourself for the step to which you drive me. You must foresee what it is, and you probably rejoice at the prospect which it holds out to you of escape from an

attachment which, though it has often stood between you and danger and disgrace, you treat with contempt when not forced to have recourse to it. My self-control is at an end — my powers of endurance are exhausted — I can struggle no longer — and if I leave my wife at a moment when she should most require the support of my presence, and such comfort as it would afford her, it is because the discovery of all which I have hitherto laboured to conceal, would be a more severe blow to her than my absence will prove. I shall endeavour to give as plausible an appearance as I can to the step which I am about to take. It is madness to hazard it; but you drive me mad. I cannot trust myself to take leave of you; by the time you awake to-morrow, I shall have left Elmsley, unless I receive from you some token of regard, some expression of regret, some promise, that for the future you will have patience with me. Is it much to ask that my love should be *endured?* Would not others in my place exact more? My fate, yours, and Alice's, are for a second time in your hands. I am still near you — near her; she is sleeping quietly, unconscious that the fate of my life and of hers is at this moment deciding. Write to me one word of kindness, and I am still ready to conquer my stormy feelings — to subdue my selfish impulses — to be to her a kind and constant protector — and to you, a friend. I shall wait here, and count the minutes till your answer reaches me, and each will seem to me a century; but do not imagine that I write this only to frighten you into a reconciliation. I solemnly swear, that, if you do not bid me stay, and bind yourself to a patient, constant, and generous indulgence to feelings, which, if concealed from others, must be appreciated and respected by you; if you do not send me such an answer, I swear that I have seen you and Alice for the last time; and that the misery which may in consequence befall her and you, my sister, and Edward himself, is your doing, and not mine. Ellen, decide!"

I read this letter in my dressing-room with my maid waiting in the passage, and in momentary expectation of Edward's coming up-stairs. Bewildered, I stood with it in my hand, unable to think or to decide. *In five minutes* there was a knock at the door; and *my maid said* — *"Mr. Lovell* is waiting for the answer, Ma'am."

The clock struck twelve; the door of the billiard-room opened, and I heard the voices of the men preparing to leave it. I snatched a bit of paper on the table and wrote hastily in pencil upon it—"Do not go, I implore you. I forgive, and will bear with you."

I sealed and gave it; and the instant afterwards would have given worlds to recall it — but it *was* gone; and when we all sat down at breakfast the next morning, and everything went on as usual; and when, for a few days at least, Henry seemed to take no advantage of my cowardly concession, I did not feel its folly, or its guilt, as I ought to have done.

I could not find out by Alice's manner how far her suspicions had been awakened, or her feelings wounded, by the discovery of my letter to her husband. She was certainly a different person from what she had been in the early days of her marriage. She had altogether lost the childish artlessness with which she used to communicate her thoughts, and relate the incidents of her daily life and innocent occupations; but on the other hand, she no longer avoided those subjects of conversation, or those books, which related to the actual state of society, or the history of the human mind. She read a great deal; book after book I saw her carry up to her own room, and the intense interest with which I watched, without daring to question her, made me closely observe her course of reading. Her mind seemed to feed upon it, and her intellect to expand; but at the same time her cheek grew pale, and in the expression of her countenance, what once was peace, had become composure; and in her character, what had been only simplicity, had grown into reserve. Her eyes were often rivetted upon Henry, with an expression not of love or of fear, but of deep and painful interest.

It was at the end of the third week in October that we moved to London, and that I took possession of my new house there.

Alice's confinement was near at hand, and so was the departure of my uncle and aunt. This was a pang which some time before would have been inexpressibly painful to me, but now I grieved over it — more from the recollection of what had once been *my happiness* with my aunt, and of the manner in which that happiness *had* passed away, than from the actual grief of separation

itself. Since my marriage, her manner to me, without being cold, had grown constrained, and she had often been on the point of giving utterance to something that seemed to agitate and distress her, but which had, however, never passed her lips. I fancied it might have reference to Henry and Alice, and I dreaded so much her speaking to me on a subject on which, alas! I could give no explanation, nor in any way change my own conduct, that instead of seeking her society during those last days in London, I, on the contrary, avoided it, and shrunk with nervous dread from being alone with her. They went; and when she took leave of me, she folded me in her arms, and whispered in my ear, "God guide thee — God bless thee! my beloved child!"

I hid my face in her bosom; and the burning tears which I shed there, were my only answer to a blessing which seemed to heap coals of fire on my head. I turned from the window whence I had watched their departure, and a sense of desolation took possession of me. I had never opened my heart to her; I had never *told* her that I was wretched; but if at any moment the cup was too full, and my heart-strings stretched to bursting, I could turn to her and say, "My soul is heavy within me," and she never said, "Why is it thus with you?" She never told me that life was fair, and my share of its blessings great, and that I *ought* to be happy. She did not *know* that I was miserable — but she *felt* it; and to me, young, strong and blooming as I then was — to me the idol of the man I adored — the spoilt child of fortune — she had in those moments the heart's instinct to say — "Earth, my child, has a grave; and in Heaven there is rest."

We went for the few days which intervened between Mr. and Mrs. Middleton's departure and the meeting of parliament, to the Moores' at Hampstead; and I enjoyed more quiet there than I had done since we had left Hillscombe.

Rosa was absent; and the society might have been reckoned dull; but to me it was a time of comparative peace, and sometimes almost of happiness.

Edward was in good spirits; and the emotion which he evinced *on seeing again the spot* where our destinies had been sealed, was

a proof how truly he loved me. And, oh, with what tenderness, with what affection, I regarded him; but how I feared him too, and with what moral weariness I strove to keep up before him, in very fear, the appearance of that character which he fondly supposed me to possess. He sternly reproved me for each act, for each word, that fell short of that standard of perfection which his imagination had drawn. He attributed to me merits and qualities which I did not possess; but, on the other hand, he looked upon me as a spoilt and fanciful child, who must be taught to see life as it is, and to fulfil its every-day duties. His praise and his blame depressed and discouraged me alike.

I was idle, for repose was a strange luxury to my weary spirit; and Edward gave me books to read, and plans to draw, and subjects to discuss, and called me severely to task when my eye was abstracted, and my manner listless. As long as he spoke to me of his affection,—as long as he listened, with fond delight, to the words of love which I addressed to him,—I forgot every painful thought, every fear, and every regret, in the happiness of the moment; but as soon as my attention was forced away from ourselves, and directed to abstract subjects, it wandered to the thousand objects of alarm and disquietude which compassed me about.

When Edward spoke to me of establishing family prayers in our house, I tremblingly objected. I went to church as often as he did; but always let him draw near to the altar alone; for, unforgiven, unabsolved, unreconciled, I dared not approach it.

On the Sunday which we spent at Hampstead, and on which this occurred, I wandered about the churchyard in solitary wretchedness, as if a spirit of evil had possession of me, and kept me away

"From Mercy's inmost shrine."

When Edward joined me again, he was low and depressed; there was a struggle in his countenance, and we walked home in silence.

In the evening, as I was sitting writing in my own room, he came in; there was a deep shade of gloom in his face; and when I *knelt by his side*, and threw my arms round his neck he disengaged *himself from me*, and, leaning his head on his hand, said, with a

voice of emotion, "I little thought when we married, that on the most sacred of all subjects, we felt so differently."

I drew from my bosom a paper, on which I had been writing the following lines, and held it out to him: —

"Self-banished, self-condemned, I stand alone,
And the closed doors between us seem to rise
In judgment and in wrath: a dull hard stone
Is in my breast; a cloud before my eyes.
I kneel; but my clasped hands are raised in vain;
They sink, weighed down by mem'ry's spell again.
My soul is mute, no melodies arise;
No sacred accents, from her shattered chords;
And speechless prayers alone, in broken sighs,
Struggle for utterance, and find no words.
But is there not a strange mysterious cry,
A mute appeal in each unconscious sigh —
A silent prayer in every secret tear,
Which man discerns not, but which God will hear?"

Edward gave me back the paper, and said coldly, "Poetry is not religion; and sentiment is not piety."

"But they may lead to them, Edward."

"They *mislead* you, I fear."

He turned away and took up a book; so did I: it was the Bible; and as I opened it, my eyes fell on the following passage: — "Hadst thou know, even thou, in this thy day the things which belong to thy peace, but now they are hid from thy sight." How long? my God, how long?

Upon our return to town, I found how much truth there had been in Henry's remark, that for the present London would suit me better than any other place. He had foreseen and calculated upon what, in fact, did happen.

I felt an involuntary relief in the way in which Edward's time was taken up, and his attention engrossed by a variety of affairs relative to his estates, as well as by a diligent attendance upon the House of Commons. When he came home to a late dinner, or took a short ride with me in the park, there was in those brief moments *so much to talk about*, so much to interest us both, such *intense enjoyment in each* other's society, that there was no op-

portunity for Edward to find fault with me, or for me to show him anything of that wayward and gloomy abstraction which irritated and displeased him. The echo of his step, the sound of his voice, was like music in my ears; and as I rushed to meet him, with a bright smile and an eager welcome, he received me with a tenderness which was too often changed to severity, when, in an hourly association, he had to observe the thousand faults which marked the course of my daily life.

There is no existence much more lonely than that of a woman just married, whose husband is constantly engaged in business, or in politics, and who happens to have no near relations or intimate friends about her. This was the case with me; I had formed none of those intimacies which fill up so large a portion in a woman's life; and the love of reading and of study, which had been strong in my girlish days, had latterly completely given way to the necessity for constant stimulus and excitement.

I found it, unfortunately, in Henry's society. As a matter of course, he was admitted to me whenever he called, and he assumed that the order, or the prayer, whichever it was, that had prevented his leaving us, gave him an indisputable right to maintain, in their fullest extent, those privileges of intimacy, which the nearness of our connection, as well as the ties that had bound us to each other, had established between us.

I had so often vainly struggled to assert my independence, that I felt afraid and ashamed of entering into further contests with him. There seemed to be more dignity in submitting, to a certain extent, to his demands, than in renewing those harassing scenes which we had so often gone through. I allowed him, day after day, to sit for hours alone with me; to read to me the most exciting books; to discuss with me subjects of the deepest interest; and to talk of his attachment to me in a way which I now never attempted to check.

Nothing could be more baneful to my character than such a state of things. The very struggle to appear better than I was in Edward's eyes, wearisome as I often found it, kept up a certain *degree of straining* after better things, and some remorse at the *contrast which the* reality presented to the outward appearance.

With Henry, on the contrary, there was no necessity to conceal the evil that was in me; and the more I gave way to the waywardness and impetuosity of my undisciplined character, the more he fed me with that most insidious of poisons, the constant homage of a blind and passionate admiration.

The beginning of that winter in London was one of those periods of false peace which sometimes occur in our lives. My hardened conscience, like the guilty prophet's of old, prophesied peace where there was no peace, and spoke smooth things while destruction was hovering around me. Now and then I made an attempt (not to repulse Henry, in very pride I dared not begin another contest with him, but) to see more of Alice, and to re-establish between us our former habitual intercourse; but there were dangers and difficulties in this which I could hardly surmount. As the time of her confinement drew near, she would seldom leave her own house; and her grandmother occasionally visited her there, which, during the preceding year, she had not done. I therefore never paid her a visit without previously ascertaining from Henry if there was any chance of meeting with this old woman, which I dreaded beyond expression; and while I was with her I could not command a restless nervousness which she evidently attributed to another cause. She was neither unkind nor repulsive in her manner to me, but a shade of coldness and reserve showed me that her eyes were, to a certain extent, opened. With regard to Edward, Henry practised a degree of caution which, though I did not dare counteract it, disgusted me at times with him and with myself. His self-command was complete; and in his presence, no word or look ever betrayed that devotion, which in his absence was so constantly displayed; and his visits were so skilfully conducted, that Edward never suspected their frequency or their length. To remain passive in such a system of deception, and when practised with regard to Edward, was sometimes more than I could do; and it occasionally happened that, in a moment of irritation, I exposed him in some artifice, or betrayed him in some scheme, in a way which required all his presence of mind to meet, *and his consummate* skill in dissimulation to carry off. *After this had occurred,* he generally left me in anger; and the

nervous feeling which such an abrupt separation caused me — the means of revenge which were constantly in his hands — the helpless ignorance in which I remained — and, in truth, I must add, the way in which I missed the excitement of his society — made me eagerly welcome, and sometimes even seek, a renewal of intercourse.

One day that Henry called at the usual hour, and that Edward happened to be at home, I saw that he was put out and annoyed at the impossibility of speaking to me alone. He gave me various hints that he had something important to say; and at last, as he was standing behind Edward, he wrote on a bit of paper, which he contrived to give me, the following words: "Alice asks to have her grandmother with her during her confinement; what can I do?" It had often occurred to me that this would happen; and much as it complicated and aggravated all my difficulties, I was not heartless enough to urge him to refuse such a request, made at such a moment. I conveyed this to him by a few words; and soon after he took his leave.

I did not see him again till two days afterwards, when he joined us at the play. Mr. Escourt was in our box. Edward had met him in the lobby, and had asked him to come in and renew his acquaintance with me. I received him coldly but civilly. My heart beat quickly each time that the door of the box opened, at the idea of a meeting between him and Henry. I did not know if they were on speaking terms; and after the insolent manner in which he had alluded the year before to Henry's devotion to me, I felt my cheeks flush as I thought of what would pass through his mind, when he should see him take his place by my side. When he did arrive, to my great surprise, I saw them shake hands, and exchange a few words with perfect civility.

How strange it is to those who are in some sense new to the world, to see the way in which time can scar those wounds which we should have imagined that nothing could have healed; wounds which we should have expected to see bleed afresh at the sight of the inflictor, as it was said of old, that those of the murdered did *at the approach* of the murderer. Sometimes we almost feel as if *nothing was real* in that singular existence called the world. Like

the performers, who laugh and talk behind the scenes after the close of some dreadful tragedy; we see around us men who have ruined the fortunes and destroyed the happiness of others, women who have betrayed and been betrayed, whose existence has been perhaps devoted to misery and to infamy by the first step they have taken in the path of guilt, and whose hearts, if they did not break, grew hard; we see the victims and the destroyers, those who have loved and those who have hated, those who have injured and those who have been injured, mix together in the common thoroughfares of life, meet even in social intimacy, with offered hands and ready smiles; not because "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy;" not because "To those who forgive, shall much be forgiven;" but because what is genuine and true, what is deep and what is strong, takes no root in that worn-out soil on which we tread, thrives not in that withering air which we breathe, in that fictitious region which we live in, and which we so emphatically and so presumptuously call *the world.*

I started when Edward turned to me and said, "How very grave you look, Ellen! One would imagine by your face that a tragedy and not a farce was going on."

I smiled and shook my head.

"Mrs. Middleton looks like the Muse of Tragedy herself," observed Mr. Escourt. "Have you ever acted, Mrs. Middleton?"

"Never."

"Indeed, I should think you would excel in it. Such a countenance! Such a play of features! Your thoughts speak in your face! Mr. Lovell, would not Mrs. Middleton make an admirable actress?"

"Where the part suited her."

"*That* would be no test of talent. I would pledge my existence that she could act to the life the most contrary characters, and enchant us in each. Which of the passions, of love or of hatred, would seem to you most difficult to represent, Mrs. Middleton?"

"Scorn would be easier than either."

"To *my mind a sudden* transition is finer than anything: an *instantaneous change of* expression, for instance, from scorn to

fear; it is one of the most striking pieces of acting that can occur, and most interesting to observe." He stopped, and fixed his eyes upon me; I riveted mine upon the stage. In a moment, with a totally different manner, I heard him say, "Pray, Mr. Lovell, do you know anything of my new gamekeeper, Robert Harding?"

I did not start, I did not move an eyelash; I heard Henry answer in a husky, uncertain manner, "Very little."

I felt that he had lost his self-command; and by a strong effort I retained mine. I made two or three remarks in an indifferent tone, and then asked Edward to change places with me, alleging that the light was in my eyes. Mr. Escourt left the box and seated himself in one exactly opposite a moment afterwards. Some friends of Edward came in, and while he was speaking to them, I whispered to Henry, "Does he know? Is it all over with me? If he does, I destroy myself! I have lived through much; but to be in *that* man's power .... Never! never!"

"Hush, take care; do not get excited. I am *sure* he does not know. Harding may have dropped some obscure hint, and I see clearly by his manner what he suspects; he thinks Harding was a messenger, or something of that sort, between us. It is all the better that he should think *that;* but I must try to get Harding away from him. Ellen, my home is insufferable; the old woman is come, and watches me like a lynx; Alice looks miserable, and she sees it."

"But then, for Heaven's sake exert yourself! Make her happy; do not neglect her as you do. Oh, Henry, is she unhappy? that is worse than anything! Would to God I were dead! you would all be at peace!"

"Hush, do not talk so wildly. I will exert myself, if you promise never to be harsh or cold to me again. Do not turn away; I do not ask you to love me. Don't I know that you adore *him?* Don't I see it in your eyes? don't I hear it in your voice, twenty times in the day? Would you not have been mine long ago, but for that cursed attachment to Edward ..."

"The curtain has dropped; Ellen, don't you intend to go?"

I hastily got up, put on my cloak, and taking Edward's arm,

went down stairs with him. When we got into the carriage, I knew by the determined silence which he maintained, that he was displeased with me.

As we were waiting for some tea in the drawing-room, he said to me abruptly, "Pray, why did you treat Escourt in the way you did this evening?"

"I have a bad opinion of him, and I cannot endure him."

"On what is that bad opinion founded?"

"I have been told that he is thoroughly unprincipled."

"Who told you this?"

I did not feel courage to name Henry; and as I hesitated, Edward went on: "If you think that a sufficient reason for not treating a person with common civility, I own I cannot understand your strict and intimate friendship with Henry. I feel a regard for him, founded on early association, and his many captivating qualities; on the same grounds, and as Mrs. Middleton's brother, it is very natural that you should feel the same; but there is a wide difference between this kind of regard, and the confidential and intimate footing you are on with him; and it is, to say the least, in very bad taste, that, at home and in the world, you should neglect my friends and acquaintances, in order to sit for hours gossiping with Henry. It seems to me extraordinary that he should devote so much time to society when Alice is unwell, and so near her confinement. Have you seen her to-day?"

"No; not to-day; her grandmother is with her."

I said this supposing he would think it a sufficient reason for not going there, as none of the family had seen Mrs. Tracy since the marriage, or had had any communication with her.

"You do not mean that you intend not to see Alice while her grandmother is with her?"

"Neither my aunt nor any of the family have met that woman...."

"They may do as they please about it; but I shall suffer no such ridiculous pride to stand in the way of your being of as much use and comfort to Alice as you possibly can. She is only too good for Henry; and he ought to bless the day on which she married him. *Go there to-morrow, Ellen*, and behave civilly to Mrs. Tracy."

"I really wish, Edward, that you would let me judge for myself on this subject. I love Alice dearly, but I *cannot* go there now. Henry himself does not wish it."

"Is Henry's opinion to be followed rather than mine?"

"No, dearest Edward, do not take it in that way; but *pray* do not insist upon my doing this."

"I *do* insist upon it, and beg to hear nothing more said against it. I desire you to go there to-morrow morning; I am sorry you have not right feeling enough to do it of your own accord, but whether you agree with me or not you must obey me."

I was going to persist; but Edward's countenance was so stern that I dared not utter another word; and all night long I lay awake racking my brain to find out some expedient, some pretext, some excuse, for eluding this order, which it seemed to me equally dangereous to obey or to resist.

CHAPTER XXII.

"I know not what I said;
"I 've said too much unless I could speak all.
* * * * * * *
* * * * * * *
* * * You 've raised the storm
Will sever us for ever * * *
The rugged hand of fate has got between
Our meeting hearts, and thrusts them from their joys."
FATAL MARRIAGE.

"Farewell; God knows when we shall meet again;
I have a faint cold fear thrill through my veins
That almost freezes up the heat of life." SHAKSPEARE.

THE following morning I got up with that jaded feeling which an anxious and sleepless night produces. As I went into my dressing-room I saw a note lying on the chimney, and recognised Henry's handwriting. I darted upon it and tore it open; the few words it contained gave me the sincerest pleasure, and put an end for the moment to the difficulty under which I laboured. This was his note; — "Alice was confined a few hours ago of a small and delicate, but I hope healthy boy. They are both, I am happy to *say, doing as* well as possible. Ask Edward if I can come and dine *with you to-day?*"

On a separate paper in the same cover were written these words: — "You need be under no fresh apprehensions from what occurred last night. It is as I thought, but you had better be civil to Escourt; he is a dangerous enemy."

I burnt this last note, and carried the other to Edward. He read it, and put it down without making any comment upon it. "Shall I send an answer directly, or wait to call there in the carriage after breakfast?"

"Just as you please."

"Is Henry to dine here?"

"Of course, as he proposes it."

I sat down to write a note in acknowledgment of Henry's, and to tell him that we should expect him to dinner. In the afternoon, when I drove out in the carriage at the usual hour, I went to his house to inquire after Alice. He came down to the door of the carriage and gave me a good account of her, but he looked gloomy and preoccupied. "How long does *she* stay?" I inquired, with a timid glance at the window.

"Ten days, I believe — ten mortal days. It is hell upon earth to play the hypocrite, from morning to night."

"If you have any good feeling you ought to be happy to-day."

"Are *you* come to preach to me too? Are *you* going to talk of the *duty* of being happy? But, come, I will be happy if I can; take me a drive, Ellen — I want air and change — my head aches horribly."

Before I could answer he had made a sign to the servant to let down the step, and had seated himself by my side. We had often driven alone together; and though after what Edward had said to me the night before, I should very much have wished to avoid this display of intimacy, I knew it would have the appearance of caprice if I refused so simple a request, and Henry did not seem in a humour to be trifled with. I said, however, in a whisper, and glancing at the windows, "Do you think this judicious?"

"She is out," he answered, in the same way; "and when we come back, you *can put me* down at the corner of the street."

I could not repress a sigh, but desired the coachman to drive

towards the King's-road. "If I had known that she was out I should have gone up-stairs to see your child."

"Poor little thing," answered Henry; "I am more pleased with it than I should have thought possible. It is quite pretty, as white as wax, and has Alice's small regular features. It was pleasant to see her smile again as she used to do, when she kissed it this morning, and held it to her heart. Do you know, Ellen, that this child will be a great blessing to her and to me too. He will fill up her thoughts, occupy her time, and engross her affections."

"He will be a link between you," I said; "it is impossible that with such a wife as Alice, and a child to love and educate together, you should not end by finding happiness in your home. Do not deny it, Henry; do not tell me I am wrong."

"You only talk for effect, that is all. You know perfectly well that happiness, in the sense in which you mean it, can never be mine."

"Well, then, the less is said on that subject the better," I interrupted impatiently. "And now, may I know why there is nothing to fear from Mr. Escourt, except his general ill-nature?"

"I must tell you that I had an explanation with Mrs. Tracy this morning. She was in tolerable good humour with me; I suppose because she had not found me quite such a brute as she expected. I mean that I showed some natural anxiety about Alice, and some joy at her safety, which was indeed what I felt. When she is not angry, I have a great deal of power over her; and I got her to tell me everything about Harding. She confessed he knew a great deal of what concerns us, partly from his father, and partly from herself, for one day that he brought her home some account of my proceedings she was so exasperated that, in her anger, she betrayed to him the whole history of Julia's death. It seems that a short time ago Escourt met him accidentally in the street, and asked him if he was not James Harding's son, and Mrs. Lovell's cousin. He had known something of his father for many years; and after one or two more interviews with him, he offered to engage him as a gamekeeper. Harding, who had no situation, *and had given* up carpentering, jumped at the offer. Just before

Mrs. Tracy left Bromley he came and told her this. She warned him not to let out what he knew; for, half from fear of me, half, I believe, from some vague hope that I am growing attached to Alice, she seems anxious to keep her promise in the spirit as well as in the letter of it. She seems at last to understand, that she cannot do you a mischief without injuring Alice at the same time; and she has taken pains to inculcate the same idea on Harding's dull brain. In the course of the same visit, he confessed to his aunt that Escourt had often questioned him about Alice; and on one of these occasions had made some coarse allusions to our intimacy, which drew from him (Harding) the boast that he could, any day, get you turned out of your husband's house. This, then, explains sufficiently Escourt's manner last night; but he will not get anything more out of Harding, or I am much mistaken."

"I own that I do not understand, or share that confidence."

"The fact is, that Harding has found out, or thinks he has found out, that Escourt has taken a wonderful fancy to Alice; he *is* just the sort of man to *be* taken by that innocent placid kind of beauty. Now, I am next to certain that his game is to get me out of the way by pushing on matters to an extremity between Edward, you, and myself, and to accomplish this by means of Harding's knowledge of what he calls our intrigue."

"Good God!" I exclaimed, with painful emotion, "if Edward was to hear the words you use, the things you say to me, and which are said of me, by such men as those! No woman has ever been so deeply degraded, so cruelly insulted, before." I threw up my veil and pushed back the hair from my cheeks, which felt burning with shame and indignation.

"It is useless to think what Edward would feel or say if he were to be acquainted with all these things; but he must and shall be kept in ignorance of them, if you will learn a little self-command, if you will only be reasonable —"

"Reasonable! Reasonable! Henry, do you know these lines?

'Go to the raging sea and say be still,
Bid the wild lawless winds obey your will,
Preach to the storm, and reason with despair,
But tell not Misery's child —'"

I could not finish the line; an overpowering sob shook my whole frame, and I threw myself back in the carriage, weeping passionately.

"Ellen, what are you doing? put down your veil and sit up. Here is the very man we have been speaking of."

I gave a violent start, but did as he bid me, and looked up in time to see Mr. Escourt riding with two other men, and taking his hat off as he passed me with the lowest possible bow. I returned it haughtily, and then turning to Henry, I said, with the utmost bitterness, "This is the consequence of your selfish determination to force your society upon me at all times and in all places. Edward is on the point of suspecting me. I have no doubt that, before to-morrow, it will be all over London that I was met driving alone with you; and, drowned in tears! This is *your* doing, *your* work, and you expect me not to hate you, not to curse the day on which — No, I do not mean all I am saying; I do not hate you, Henry; but it is hard to suffer as I do, and not to grow wicked. Stop the carriage, I implore you, and walk home."

"My dearest Ellen, this will only make matters worse. It will seem as if you were ashamed of being seen alone with me. Now, considering the closeness of our connection and our old friendship, any appearance of that sort would have a much worse effect than anything else. Drive straight to your own house, and I will walk home from there. It is much better that Edward himself should see how little you dread observation."

I gave way in silence; but as we drew near home I looked anxiously at the windows, for I felt that after Edward's remarks on the preceding evening, to drive in that way with Henry, was very like braving him. I felt relieved at not seeing him, and as I walked through the hall I inquired if he was at home.

"No, Ma'am, Mr. Middleton called an hour ago to say that two gentlemen, beside Mr. Lovell, would dine here to-day; that I was to tell you so when you came home."

I went up to the drawing-room and sat down at the piano-forte, *to try to get over* the time till Edward's return as well as I could. *I was bent upon* mentioning to him the drive I had taken with

Henry, as I quite agreed with the latter that any attempt at concealment would fatally endanger my future peace, and I had made the firmest resolution that nothing should ever lead me again into an unnecessary act of deceit. It was dressing-time, and still Edward was not come home. I walked impatiently up and down the room, and at last it grew so late that I was obliged to ring for my maid and to begin dressing.

While I was doing my hair, Edward rushed into the room in a great hurry, and said as he held the door open, "Ellen, love, dress as quick as you can, and go into the drawing-room. Sir Edmund Ardern and Escourt are arrived." Changing into French, he added, "I should not have asked Escourt, as I know you do not like him, if it had not been that when I pressed Ardern to come, he said before him that they were engaged to dine together at the club, which obliged me to invite them both."

I was inexpressibly annoyed, especially at having had no opportunity of informing Edward of my drive with Henry. As soon as I was dressed I went to his room; but he desired me so impatiently to go to the drawing-room, that it took away my courage to tell him all I had intended to say.

Pride enabled me to make a strong effort over myself and to meet Mr. Escourt without embarrassment; but turning immediately away from him, I entered into conversation with Sir Edmund. He took up a newspaper and read it assiduously, till first Henry, and then Edward came into the room.

We went down to dinner, and nothing passed for some time but conversation on general subjects. I could not conquer my uneasiness. Whenever I heard the sound of Mr. Escourt's voice, or felt his eyes fixed upon me, a kind of shudder ran through me, and the cold dry manner in which I answered his questions, though each time I repented of it, still re-occurred the next minute. I knew that this was bad policy, and that it made Edward angry; but much as I had deceived in my life, I had never been able to dissemble; and the effort to do so in this case was beyond my strength.

After *one of those* pauses during which everybody wonders *who will speak next, and* which had been brought on by some short

answer I had given to a question of Mr. Escourt, he abruptly turned to me and said, "By the way, Mrs. Middleton, you could decide a bet we made this morning, Ardern and I. Did you happen to observe if it was Mrs. Ernsley that we passed a few minutes after we met you on the King's-road this morning?"

"I don't know. I did not observe."

"Did you, Mr. Lovell?"

"It struck me that it was Mrs. Ernsley."

"Then I am afraid I have lost my bet, unless Mrs. Middleton would try to remember the contrary. Come, Mrs. Middleton, make an effort in my behalf. Did Mr. Lovell turn to you and say, 'Is not that Mrs. Ernsley?' or did he positively say, 'There is Mrs. Ernsley.' A great deal would depend upon that."

My mouth quivered while I repeated, with what must have had the appearance of ill-humour, that I remembered nothing about it. In vain I tried to turn the conversation; he continued to appeal alternately to Henry and to me about the gay appearance of the nursery gardens we had passed, and the style of architecture of the new church at Chelsea, until he had succeeded in plainly establishing the fact that we had been that day taking a long drive together. While this was going on I had not ventured to look at Edward; but when at last another subject was started, and I had heard him make some indifferent remark in his natural tone of voice, I raised my eyes to his. He was pale, and his lips were firmly compressed, but he exerted himself and talked a great deal. I was so entirely occupied in watching him, that, when Henry bent forward and said to me, "Sir Edmund is asking you to drink wine with him," I gave a violent start, and my hand shook so, that I could hardly hold the glass.

I left the room soon after, and as I walked into the drawing-room, its very look of brightness and comfort made my heart ache. It would have been a relief to cry, but I dared not give way; *it would not do* (that phrase which Henry was eternally repeating to me); it would not do to be found in tears. I would not *think*. I tried to play; but whether the tune was sad or gay it seemed *equally to affect* me. I took up book after book from the table; *but whether it* was "Macauley's Reviews," or "Southey's Poems,"

a volume of Shakspeare, or a book of sermons, there was in each page some passage or expression, which, by its eloquence or its simplicity, its gaiety or its grief, touched the spring of sorrow which was swelling up to the brink, and that was only kept down by a sort of passive resistance.

I took refuge in an Annual, and page after page of short tales and addresses to Finden's Beauties, I glanced over successfully, till the following lines, by Miss Landon, caught my eye, as I was rapidly turning over the leaves: —

> "I see the clouds pass o'er the moon, and my spirit
> Grows dark with the terrors that round it are thrown;
> O Surrey, whatever my lot may inherit,
> I care not, so suffering but reach me alone."

I do not know that they are good lines — very likely not — but they burst from the heart and from the lips like a groan or a sob, and they gave words to what I had felt since I had looked upon Edward's face, and seen in it, for the first time since our marriage, not anger, not sternness, but suffering.

I shut the book hastily, and snatched up a newspaper, as I heard the door of the first drawing-room open.

Henry brought me some flowers which I had left in the dining-room, and said to me in a low voice, "For Heaven's sake don't look so miserable! Exert yourself; this will never do."

There are sometimes particular phrases which try one, and jar upon one's feelings; and this last was of that number. I darted upon Henry a look of angry reproach, and said in a hurried manner, "*It will never do* to be goaded in this way! I cannot answer for what I may say if you stay here. Your presence and your advice are insults which drive me mad, and if you do not go, I feel that I shall lose my head."

As I spoke, I tore the flowers in my hand into pieces, which I flung one by one into the fire.

"Have mercy upon your bouquet, Mrs. Middleton! You are beheading those beautiful camellias in the most cruel manner," exclaimed Sir Edmund.

"The organ of destructiveness must be strong in you, fair *lady," observed Mr. Escourt,* with one of his blandest smiles.

Again an icy chill ran through me; but I hated this man so intensely, that not even terror could subdue me: and when Sir Edmund asked me if I had courage to kill an insect, I answered—"There are insects so loathsome and contemptible, that to crush them is a pleasure."

I felt that I was making an odious speech; I saw in Edward's face an expression almost of disgust. I felt that I was sinking every moment in his opinion; perhaps losing ground in his affections. I felt that this was the work of those men who, one under the cover of a devoted attachment, the other of playful gallantry, were ruining and exposing me.

A spirit of reckless defiance took possession of me, and I completely lost my head. A torrent of words burst from my lips, of which I hardly knew the meaning, as I uttered them. I said there were crimes worse than murder. I said that to torture was worse than to kill: to make life a curse worse than to take it away. I pointed to the insect that was crawling on the table, and asked if it would not be mercy to kill it, and cruelty, damnable cruelty, to tear off a wing one day, and a limb the next, and so on, till nothing remained of its tortured frame but the quivering pulse of life. I spoke of men who die on the scaffold, or who drag on existence in jails and hulks, and whose hearts are not so hard, whose spirits are not so brutal, as those of others who come into our houses, who sit at our tables, with smiles on their lips and poison in their tongues, whose language is refined, and whose thoughts are devilish.

Strange and terrible words they were which I spoke in that hour; there was eloquence and power in them, for what is so eloquent as the pent-up agony of years, when at last it finds a vent? What is so powerful as the outpouring of the soul, when it breaks down the barriers it has long respected?

They quailed before my glance, those two men whose victim I was. Mr. Escourt's pale cheek was flushed, and Henry's grew pale. He trembled for himself and for me. The fabric which he had raised by his cunning, and maintained by his arts, was tottering to its base. Like to Samson in the temple of the Philis*tines, strength* had returned to me in the hour of abasement; and

I was dragging down upon him, and upon myself, the ruin which had so long hung over my head.

"I would advise you to choose another theme for the display of your eloquence, than the apology of *murder*."

A convulsive shudder seized me as Edward addressed to me these terrible words. If he had charged me with the guilt of murder, I could not have trembled more violently.

"You are ill, Mrs. Middleton; I am sure you are ill!" exclaimed Sir Edmund, springing forward to support me.

I felt myself falling, and stretched out my hand to take hold of Edward's; when I grasped it, it was as cold as ice. He led me out of the room; and when he had placed me on the sofa in my dressing-room, he rang the bell. As soon as my maid came in, he left me without a look or a word.

I did not attempt to recall him; I was stunned and exhausted. I felt an inexpressible longing to forget the anguish I was enduring; and, while my maid was for a moment out of the room, I hastily took a large dose of laudanum, which first stupified, and then sent me to sleep.

When I woke again it was with that sense of complete bewilderment which that sort of sleep produces. The shutters and curtains were closed, the candles were lit on the dressing-room table, and my maid was sitting on a chair near the fire. I called her and asked in a drowsy voice what o'clock it was.

"It is near nine o'clock, Ma'am."

"Why is it so dark? Why are the shutters shut? Have I been ill?"

"You have been sleeping a long time, Ma'am. The doctor thinks you must have taken a little too much laudanum."

"Laudanum! How? When?"

Gradually the recollection of the scene of the preceding evening returned to me, and of the sedative I had so rashly taken. I held my head with my hands, and asked where Edward was?

"Mr. Middleton desired to be told when you should awake, Ma'am; and he wishes the doctor to see you too."

She went out of the room, and I felt as I some new form of

misery was hanging over me. Why had Edward desired to be informed of my waking instead of watching over me himself? If my long sleep had been alarming, ought I not to have awoke in his arms? I now remembered all that had occurred during the last two days, and I felt as if a crisis was approaching. The door opened, but instead of Edward, Dr. Harris came in; and after hoping I felt pretty well, and feeling my pulse, he asked me some questions about the quantity of laudanum I had taken. I named a certain number of drops at a guess, for I had hardly measured the quantity. He left me, and a moment afterwards I heard him speaking with Edward in the dressing-room. I sprang out of bed, glided to the door, and listened.

"Indeed I can assure you," I heard him say, "that you need be under no alarm about Mrs. Middleton's health. The quantity of sedative she has taken can produce only temporary inconvenience if she keeps quiet. It cannot affect her materially. I would not tell you so if I did not feel convinced of it. Indeed, the very fact of being under its influence will make the intelligence you have to communicate less likely to affect her in an alarming manner than at any other time."

"Then I shall go to her at once."

I hurried back into bed; my teeth chattering with cold, and my heart throbbing to suffocation. An instant after I heard his step, and he walked up to the bed. His face was as pale as death, and he wore his travelling fur coat. I uttered a faint scream, and clasped my hands.

"Do not agitate yourself, Ellen."

I burst into tears; for although he had not said one word of kindness, he had called me Ellen, and that was something. He went on in a dry, broken, and hurried manner: "I have, indeed, bad news to tell you; but I hope and pray that the case may be one of more alarm than of actual danger. Your uncle has sent an express for me; he believes himself to be dying, and he charges me not to lose a minute in hurrying to him. The carriage is at the door, and I must take leave of you. Here is your aunt's letter, and one from the physician at Hyéres. This last affords considerable hope that Mr. Middleton may yet be spared to us....."

"Oh! may I not — should I not go to him too?"

"The state to which you have reduced yourself by your imprudence makes it impossible."

"For God's sake, let me go with you, Edward."

I took his hand, but he drew it abruptly away. I mentally cursed the day on which I was born.

"Calm yourself," said Edward, sternly; "I cannot speak to you now: I shall write to you. A new state of things must begin between us; but this is no time for an explanation."

"No, no! you *cannot*, you *shall* not leave me with so horrible a doubt, so dreadful a fear....."

"Have you forgotten that your uncle is dying? Is this a moment for theatrical display? — for the exhibition of a feigned tenderness?"

"Feigned! Good God! is it come to that?"

"Have you no message to send him? — no pardon to implore of him as well as of me?"

"Edward! what are you saying? Edward! Edward! — do you know? Have you heard? — Do you forgive? I am innocent! — on my knees I swear that I am innocent!"

"Innocent! Yes, I believe you are what you have learned to call innocent, — and may God keep you so. I dare not trust myself to say another word. I have struggled to be calm; I have prayed earnestly for strength against myself, — strength not to cast you off, and it has been given me. God bless you, and forgive you! I shall write to you soon and often, and, I hope, send better accounts of Mr. Middleton. Write to me and to your aunt."

He coldly held out his hand to me, and I felt as if I was dying. I opened my arms wildly, and cried, "Kill me, but do not leave me so!"

A convulsive emotion passed over his face; he bent over me and kissed me. I threw my arms round his neck and clung to him. Oh! did not all the love of my soul pass into his, in that one last embrace? As my throbbing heart was pressed to his, did not each pulsation tell all its passionate tenderness? For an instant he seemed to feel it, for he drew me closer and closer to *him; but suddenly he started back*, as if he recoiled from my

touch, and almost flung me from him; and, disengaging his hand from mine, he left me abruptly.

I heard his steps down the stairs; I heard his voice in the hall; then there was a moment during which I heard nothing; and then there was the sound of the carriage-wheels; and then the hall-door was shut; and then all was over; and I wrung my hands, and thrust the bed-clothes into my mouth to stifle my groans. I felt as if my head would burst. Sob after sob rose in my chest and shook my frame; and all night the doctor was by my side, and he and my maid gave me draughts to drink, which I took eagerly, for my mouth was parched and my lips burning; and towards morning I fell asleep again.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"Oh there 's a fatal story to be told,
Be deaf to that as Heaven has been to me.
* * * * * *
* * * * * *
How wilt thou curse thy fond believing heart,
Tear me from the warm bosom of thy love,
And throw me like a poisonous weed away.
Can I bear that? bear to be curst and torn
And thrown out of thy family and name —
Like a disease? Can I bear this from thee?
I never can, no, all things have their end,
When I am dead, forgive and pity me."

FATAL MARRIAGE.

"I must be patient till the Heavens look
With an aspect more favourable * *
I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
Perchance, shall dry your pities, but I have
That honourable grief lodg'd here, which burns
Worse than tears drown." SHAKSPEARE.

THE next day I did not attempt to get up; it seemed to me that Edward's absence, and his last words, had taken from me all energy — all power of thinking or acting. It was as a dream that I could not shake off, though at the same time I felt all its dreadful reality. I dared not stir in body or in spirit; the quiet *of a sick-room* — the silence around me — the exclusion of light

and noise — harmonised with the extraordinary state in which I was. Strange delusions haunted me; I often saw figures pass and repass before my bed; and when it was Edward's form that I discerned, I held my breath, and prayed that the illusion might last. But sometimes they were dreadful; the visions I had — the voices I heard! I dare not think of them now; for the night is coming — my room is dark — my sight is weak — and my brain is on fire * * * *

On the third morning after Edward's departure a letter was brought to me. The direction was in his handwriting, and a mist obscured my sight. I pressed it to my heart, and closed my eyes for an instant. *Now*, I should know all. *Now*, I should know my sentence. Alice's rival — Henry's accomplice — I stood condemned by my own heart; and as I broke the seal of Edward's letter, I felt as if I should read my death-warrant.

EDWARD'S LETTER.

"CALAIS, *Saturday.*

"This is the first time I have written to you since our marriage. This is better for yourself and for me, and makes it easier to write now in the way in which henceforward we must act and feel towards each other. I will not upbraid you. God has visited upon me the sin of my heart, and I pray to Him that yours may never find you out. To save you from the last step in guilt, and all its misery, is now my only object.

"I shall return to you as soon as the sacred duty I am now engaged in is fulfilled; I shall return to you, for I wish your reputation to be preserved. The only request I make is, that you will never again attempt to act the part which you have hitherto so ably performed. I shall expect from you respect and submission, for without them, how can I save you? but one of those looks — one of those words which once made my happiness, would *now* drive me from you for ever. Attempt no defence; offer no explanations; if you repent, mourn over the past in silence, and silently resign yourself, as I do, to the life which lies before us. *Write to me, but do not answer* this letter. That you may not be

tempted to do so, I will go through the painful task of explaining to you the manner in which my eyes have been opened to what I might have seen long ago, had it not been for the deep hypocrisy of your life, and of your character. I said I would not upbraid you; but the simple mention of facts must become the most cutting reproach. When I look back to the last two years, and remember the many proofs I have had of your secret and powerful interest in Henry's fate, and of the tenacity with which you have clung to his society, I ask myself how you could ever have deceived me as you have done? But when I recollect what you have professed, the way in which you have acted, all that you have said to me, I almost doubt the evidence of my senses.

"Vague but painful doubts had latterly shot across me; and had I believed it to be in human nature, or in woman's power, to feign such love as you seemed to feel for me, I should have *feared* what I *now know*. From the moment when, in accidental conversation, I heard that in defiance of my advice, you had spent the day alone with Henry, to that in which I received anonymously the notes I now send you, the truth was gradually disclosed to me. I saw you change colour; I saw your lip quiver, and heard your voice tremble. I saw you in ungovernable passion upbraid the man who you fancied had betrayed you, and then, in the excess of your agitation, you fainted at my feet. When I went to your bedside, and gazed on your pale face, with the faint hope that I had been mistaken, that I had not read right your uncontrollable agitation — even then your lips opened and uttered a passionate adjuration to Henry, not to leave or forsake you, which drove me from your side with thoughts and feelings that time and prayer alone can subdue. When, on the following day, in a cover, directed by an unknown hand, I received the confirmation of what was already too sure, in the first agony of grief and indignation, I resolved to part from you for ever; and it was not till I had gone through the severest struggles with myself, that I came to my present determination. The summons I received a few hours afterwards to your uncle's death-bed, confirmed it. I would not carry *to his dying ears* the intelligence of your guilt, and of its results; *nor would I load* my conscience with promises which, had I dis-

carded you, could never have been fulfilled. You have not yet been criminal save in thought and in heart; you have sworn it, and I believe you. God have mercy upon you, if in this too you have deceived me; but if you are not perjured — if you have not called upon God Almighty to witness a lie — then kneel to Him each day of your life, and bless Him that he has saved you. And now listen to the commands I lay upon you, and obey them strictly, as you value — what shall I say? What have you ever valued? What have you ever respected? You have profaned the most sacred feelings — the holiest emotions of our nature; and I know not by what tie, by what hope, or by what fear to adjure you. If you would not become a mark for the finger of scorn to point at; if you would not die of a broken heart, or live with a hardened one; if you have any horror of the lowest depths of vice, or any lingering sense of duty, weigh the importance of this moment of your life, and throw not away this last hope of salvation. I have written to Mrs. Moore to propose to her that as soon as you are well enough to move, you should go to Hampstead, and remain there till my return. I forbid you, in the most positive manner, to receive a single visit from Henry, or to open a letter from him. I not only request, but command you, neither by letter or by word to make any answer to *this* letter, or to allude to the subject of it. By your strict compliance with these injunctions, I shall judge of your desire to enter upon a new course, and, save in the secret penitence of your heart, to discard the remembrance of the past. "E. MIDDLETON."

Inclosed in this letter were the following notes:

"Do not go, I implore you; I forgive, and will bear with you. — *Thursday.*"

"You left me in anger three days ago, and I feel a nervous dread of what will happen next. I cannot bear this suspense; write or come. — *Sunday.*"

"I shall have no rest till I have seen you; since that woman is arrived, I feel as if all would be discovered. — *Friday.*"

The chain *of evidence* against me was overpowering, and I *clasped my hands in* silent despair. I read Edward's letter upon

my knees; and murmured blessings were choked in their utterance, by the convulsive emotion which mastered me. At that moment it seemed to me agony past endurance, that he should accuse and judge me falsely; that he should call my love hypocrisy; I thought I would rather die, than meet him in the way he prescribed, as life could have no greater misery in store for me than this; but by degrees I grew conscious that there was not so heavy a load on my breast, so racking an anguish in my brain, as I had known in those hours when, tortured with anxiety, I had been commanded to smile; when, degraded in my own eyes, and condemned by my own heart, I had been placed by him on a pinnacle, from which I dreaded each moment to be hurled. His praises had often run like daggers into my heart; but now his reproaches, his upbraidings, were answered by the mute consciousness of a love, which in the midst of guilt and misery, and bitter humiliation, had remained pure, sacred, and entire. Then flashed for an instant through my mind, like a ray of light and hope, the thought of *confession*, full, ample, and complete confession! What depths of repose in that word! What pledge of peace! What renewal of confidence! What possibility of happiness! I rose suddenly and threw the window open; and as the cold air fanned my cheek, I felt that I might be happy still. Again I seized his letter, and as I opened it, my eyes fell on the passage where he said, "If you are not perjured, if you have not called upon Almighty God to witness a lie." It froze in its current the source of hope, which for an instant had sprung up in my breast, for it reminded me of the oath by which I had bound myself never to reveal the truth to Edward. It was as if a hand of ice had chilled the warm blood that had begun to circulate freely about my heart. I set my teeth together, and muttered to myself that I would break that fatal oath; but even while I said it, I felt I dared not do it. I needed all my strength, all my courage; I needed God's help, and God's mercy, even now to confess to Edward the dreadful secret of my life, the horrible trials, the bitter humiliations I had gone through; and in the face of a broken oath, with the guilt of *perjury on my* soul, how could I hope for mercy or for peace? I *struggled with my* conscience; I bade it be silent; but in vain.

This new form of crime staggered and confounded me; I dared not add fuel to the flame, or a new kind of remorse to the dark visions that already haunted my days, and visited my dreams. I gazed upon those blotted scraps of paper before me, the records of weakness and misery, but not of guilt; and the veins of my temple swelled, and my hands were clenched with powerless rage as I thought of the part which Henry had throughout acted by me, and of which this was the close. He had either betrayed me himself; or by a cruel carelessness, a heartless negligence, he had failed to destroy the proofs of our fatal intimacy, and had left them in the power of my *relentless* enemy.

A servant came in, and putting down a letter on the table, he said, "Mr. Lovell has been very often to inquire after you, Ma'am, and he begs to know if he can see you now; or if he shall call again this afternoon."

I would have given worlds to have admitted Henry, to have poured forth in words the burning anger of my soul, or implored a release from my fatal oath; but Edward's command was before my eyes; his letter was in my hand; and I said, in as calm a voice as I could command, "Tell Mr. Lovell that I am engaged now, and that I shall not be at home this afternoon." I glanced at the letter on the table, and saw that it was not from Henry, but from Mrs. Moore, who, with a thousand regrets and apologies for having been suddenly obliged to leave home for the sea-side, put her villa at my disposal, and hoped I would stay there as long as might suit me. This opened a new source of embarrassment to me. I could not resolve with myself whether to accept this offer or to refuse it. If Henry was determined to force his visits upon me, I felt that I should be more unprotected at Hampstead, less able to exclude him there than in town, and yet I was afraid that Edward should suppose I was not prepared in everything to follow his directions. I determined at last to write to him that Mrs. Moore had left Hampstead, and that I should therefore remain in town till I heard from him again, or till the blessed moment of his return. As I looked over my letter I seized the pen and scratched out that word *blessed,* which he would have branded with hypocrisy. Never *did a letter of a few lines cost* such painful labour or such anxious

thought as that I sent to Edward in return for his. Many and many a foul copy I wrote, in which protestations and prayers, self-accusations and passionate justifications, succeeded each other with frantic vehemence; but as I read over these bursts of feeling, these impassioned appeals, I tore them up and gave them to the flames; for to disobey him *now*, was to endanger the frail tenure by which I clung to him, and, as he had said himself, to drive him from me; and yet to accept the conditions of pardon, to submit humbly to the terms held out to me, was a tacit admission of the truth of his accusations and of the justice of my condemnation.

At one moment I resolved to brave his anger; boldly and earnestly to declare to him my innocence, not from crime only, but from a feeling or a thought inconsistent with the truest and most ardent affection that ever woman felt, or man inspired; and, in defiance of his orders, but in the strictest integrity of heart, to seek Henry, and by prayers, by reproaches, by upbraidings, by all the power which a strong will, and the consciousness of his unconquerable passion for me, could give, to obtain from him a release from my oath, and liberty to kneel at Edward's feet, and to clasp his knees, with a confession of every sin, but that of not loving him.

But then, again, I shrank from the rash efforts, from the fatal risks, which this plan involved, and it seemed to me best to submit in humble resignation to his will; to accept his mistaken severity, his coldness, and his scorn, as a just expiation for a course of sin and deceit; and to trust that, in a life spent by his side, in compliance with his will, in submission to his dictates, in absolute devotion, and unremitting tenderness, which my lips would never express, but which my conduct would reveal, I should at last have my reward — his belief in that love which could bear, believe, endure, and hope all things.

Tossed by these conflicting thoughts, jaded by this incessant and racking anxiety, at last I sent a few lines which I had copied out several times — for sometimes a word had seemed to me too cold, or too abrupt, too like, or too unlike those which were *struggling to* escape from my heart and from my pen, or else my *tears had* stained the paper.

In conclusion, I said, "If, on his dying bed, my uncle names me, do not ask him to say 'God bless her!' but 'God forgive her.'"

I also wrote to Mrs. Middleton, and when these two letters were gone, I felt relieved.

The state in which I lived during the next few days was strange. In the midst of London I was in perfect solitude. Rather than forbid the servants to let Henry in, I gave a general order to deny me to every one, without exception.

Early in the morning, I drove into the country for some hours, and the rest of the day I spent in my back drawing-room buried in thought, and alternately giving way to the gloomiest anticipations, or the most vague and groundless visions of future happiness.

Every day I sent a servant to inquire after Alice; and the report of her continued to be favourable.

On the third day after Edward's departure, and after Henry had made several fruitless attempts to see me, a letter was brought to me, and I immediately felt it was from him. My first impulse was to seize a cover and enclose it back to him, without a word of explanation; but, on cooler reflection, I determined to write to him.

Edward had not forbidden me to do so; and to explain my present conduct, was the only chance of keeping up that power over him, on which so much depended. I therefore wrote as follows: —

"The crisis of my fate is come. Henceforward, if I take one more step in the downward course in which I have been so cruelly entangled, I am lost for ever. If you feel any of that regard for me which you have so long professed, I need not make any comments upon the fact which I now disclose to you.

"The notes which at different times I have sent you, and which so fatally misrepresent our relative positions, have been sent to Edward; and this letter, of which I inclose you a copy, is the result. I will not attempt to make you understand what I have suffered — what I suffer. I dare not see you; I dare not receive a letter from you; and yet, before Edward's return, I must; for there

is an oath which you once imposed upon me, which must be cancelled—you *must* absolve me from it, if you do not wish to drive me to despair — to perjury on the one hand, or to a life of hopeless misery on the other.

"Henry! you who have been my best friend, and my worst enemy, have pity upon me. Do not condemn me to fresh remorse —to further struggles—to eternal hypocrisy. Do not write to me any sophistry on this subject; do not try to blind my eyes again; to deceive me to my ruin. If you have the cruelty to steel yourself against my prayers, against my earnest supplications, then leave me to myself; and take with you the consciousness that you have filled up the measure of your iniquities, and heaped upon my head all the miseries which the most savage hatred could devise.

"Would to God that I could find words to touch you! Would to God that I could reach your heart! and carry to it the conviction, that you would be happier yourself by giving way to my entreaties, than by maintaining a tyranny which is as criminal as it is cruel.

"By all that you hold sacred, hear me, Henry! In the name of your sister—in the name of your child—hear me! As you would not bring misery upon them, hear me! My whole soul is in this prayer—the fate of my whole life is in its issue—have mercy upon me, as you ever hope for mercy yourself.

"Yours,

"Ellen Middleton."

This was my letter, and day by day I watched and trembled each time that the sound of the bell or a knock at the door roused a hope that its answer might come. During that period I received two short and hurried letters from Edward, dated from the towns where he stopped for an hour or two on his way to Hyéres. The solitude of my life became at last intolerable; I began to feel an impetuous desire to change something in the course of my days; to see some one, to speak to some one, and yet I shrunk from the sight of a common acquaintance, or of a commonplace friend. At last, one morning, a note was brought to me, but the direction was written not by Henry but by Alice. It only contained these *words:*—

"My dear Ellen,

"I wish to see you, and I beg of you to come to me.

"Yours, Alice Lovell.

I knew not whether Mrs. Tracy was gone—I knew not whether I should see Henry—I was in total ignorance of what this visit might produce: but it was a relief to do something—to change something in the order of my day; and as Edward had not forbidden me to visit Alice, I felt justified in going to her, and prepared to do so. As I arrived at her door and walked up-stairs to her, for the first time I felt a sensation of bodily weakness, which gave me a sudden apprehension that my physical strength was giving way under such protracted mental suffering. The door was opened, and I found Alice alone. As I looked at her I felt one of the severest pangs I had ever yet experienced. Never in my life had I seen anybody so altered. There was not a single speck of colour in her cheek; her eyes looked unnaturally large, and the black under them was deeply marked. She came to meet me, but did not offer to kiss me; she held out her thin pale hand; and, slightly pressing mine, made me sit down by her. She inquired about Mr. Midleton; and after I had answered her questions, there was a pause, which I broke by saying, in a trembling voice, "How is your child, Alice? May I not see him?"

She opened the door of the next room, and showed me the cradle. The child was asleep, and as I gazed upon it the tears which I struggled to repress almost choked me. "He is beautiful," I said.

"Yes, he *is* beautiful," she murmured, as she knelt down by the cradle. "He *is* beautiful, but he does not thrive; he is not strong." She took the tiny hand pressed it to her pale lips; and then she rose, and we returned to the drawing-room.

"How you must love him, Alice," I said, with a sigh.

"I do," she answered; and then she put her hand to her forehead, and a sudden flush overspread her face, her brow, her neck. Her breathing was quick; and she added, in a voice of intense emotion, "But *if* you think I do not love his father, you *are mistaken.*"

"Alice, I never said — I never thought —"

"Oh yes you did, and you were right to think so; for when I married him I loved him as a child, not as a woman loves; but real love and real sorrow came in time, and strength and courage are come with them. Ellen, I love him; and I charge you not to stand between him and me. I suppose I am doing a strange thing now, but it seems to me right. I have none to help me, none to counsel me but my own heart, and the sorrow which has long been secretly buried within it. I married, and the world before me was a blank, but a blank in which the spirit of God seemed to me to move as it did in the beginning of time, on the face of the waters. All was outside then in my life, inside in my brain in my heart there was nothing but peace and joy — joy that the sky was bright, and the earth gay with flowers in the summer, and white with pure snow in the winter. I *learnt* what life and love are in the books Henry gave me. I *felt* what they were the first time I saw him with you. I shut the books — I shut my eyes — I was a coward — I was afraid of my own heart — afraid of the life I saw before me, till strength was given me to encounter it. I saw that mine was Leah's and not Rachael's portion, and I prayed for grace not to shrink from my cup of sorrow. I do not shrink from it now; but, for Henry's sake, for the sake of my child, I must struggle with you and with your strange power, and God will be with me, Ellen, for you seek to put asunder what He has joined together."

"Alice, Alice, spare me, for I am miserable. Spare me, for your sorrows are no more like my sorrows than the martyr's sufferings resemble the dying criminal's agony. Let me hide my face on your knees — cover me with the hem of your garment, and let the tears that fall on my head plead for me to the God whom you adore, for they are like those which the angels in Heaven shed over a sinner who repents. Pray — pray that his heart may be softened; pray for him, for yourself, for me. Pray that I may prevail or die; God forgive me, I dare not die, but I cannot live as I have lived —"

"*Ellen, do* not talk so wildly. I dare not speak words of hope *or of comfort if* you do not cast this weakness from you — if you

do not struggle with a passion begun in sin, and which can only end in destruction."

"Alice, I swear by all that is most sacred, — I swear it as I would on my dying bed, — that I do not love your husband; and that now —"

"Oh, then you have done wickedly! You have never loved him, and yet you have sought his love, and worked on his feelings, till his nature, which was kind, has grown fierce; and his pale cheek has grown paler still. You have never loved him? and yet you have made him forget every duty and every tie. You have taken his heart from me, from his child, from his home, and you value it not. In wantonness you have taken his love and my happiness away — you have played with it and destroyed it. Oh, Ellen, God have mercy upon you, for you are very wicked!"

"I have been guilty, I have been wicked, Alice, but not in the way you think. Believe me, there is a mystery in all this which I dare not explain."

"Oh, yes; there has been a mystery in the air we breathe, in the words we have all spoken to each other, in our lives, and in our hearts. My grandmother trembles and turns pale when you are named, or when your carriage drives by in the street; and even now the colour forsakes your cheek, and your lips quiver as I speak of her. Henry married *me* an ignorant child — as I have learnt since that men wed brides who are rich and noble, for their rank and for their riches, without loving me or trying to make me love him. He hates Robert Harding and curses him in a low voice when we meet him, and yet he speaks to him civilly, and offers him money which he spurns, and presents which he refuses. *You* say you do not love Henry, you swear it, and yet day after day you spend hours with him, and when he has been absent from you, you have called him back. You have written to him in secret, and turned pale when your letters have been discovered. Oh, there is a deep and terrible mystery in all this, and we have walked in darkness till we have almost forgotten what light is."

I hid my face in my hands, overcome by the force of Alice's words, and unable to meet the searching power of her glance. *There was a long deep silence* between us, and then I rose to go,

and said to her as I did so, with my eyes fixed on the ground, "You pray for your enemies, pray for me. You pray for those who suffer in body and in mind — pray for me. You may never learn how right and how wrong you have been to-day; but you cannot be wrong in praying to God for me, for He has vexed me with all His storms, all His waves have gone over me, and I am well-nigh overwhelmed. My only hope is in the mercy of one who has never yet showed mercy either to you or to me."

I left her, and never again have I seen that angel face, that pale and blighted form, or heard the accents of her low and solemn voice; but if there is a saint who pleads for me on earth, or an angel who intercedes for me in Heaven, it is she whose life I have blighted, and whose heart I have broken.

CHAPTER XXIV.

"Some sudden flash of lightning strike me blind,
Or cleave the centre of the earth, that I
May living find a sepulchre to swallow
Me and my shame together!"

THE GUARDIAN — MASSINGER.

"So the struck deer, the arrow at his heart,
Lies down to die in some sequestered part;
There stretched unseen, in coverts hid from day,
Bleeds drop by drop, and pants his life away." POPE.

I WENT home, and as I walked into the house I saw a letter in Henry's handwriting lying on the table. I took it, and having locked myself in my dressing-room, I opened it with trembling fingers and read as follows: —

"You do not choose to answer my letters, and I am sent away from your door like a troublesome beggar. My sister is in the deepest affliction, and I vainly inquire of you what accounts you have of her. You are playing a desperate game, if you imagine, by such heartless insults, to rid yourself of my love. They change its nature I own. I get weary of suffering alone, and life is not *long enough to* waste it in the burning strife and heart-consuming *agitations in* which we live. There is an end to all things, and if

for twenty-four hours longer you trifle with me you will repent it to the day of your death. Have I not told you that the time must come when, if you have not learnt to love me, I shall make you hate me?"

My last letter to Henry had been intercepted; I saw it clearly and with despair, for I had written it with that intensity of supplication, that strength of appeal which must have reached his heart. I had built all my hopes upon it, and now the apparent scorn and unfeelingness of my conduct had brought him to that hard and reckless mood which I most dreaded. I felt that at any cost I must pacify him; and in the explanation I sent him there was more of self-defence than accusation, more entreaty than reproach; I addressed him rather as an injured friend than as a cruel enemy. It was late in the day before I had satisfied myself that the tone of my letter was calculated to soothe and pacify him, and then I dared not trust to chance for its delivery. With an unsteady hand I gave it to the servant, and desired him to deliver it into Mr. Lovell's own hand: and then the night came with its long hours of darkness, of restless sleep and of waking misery.

How was it, that when I woke on the next morning, and felt that the air was heavy and the atmosphere dark, I did not see in it a sign of what that day would bring forth? How was it that when I went into Edward's room, and gazed on every familiar object which seemed to bring his image before me, I did not feel more wretched than usual, — I did not long for his return, or dread it with more intensity than the day before; and when I pressed his picture to my lips, the tears that dimmed my eyes did not flow more bitterly than usual? The post came in; and there were letters for me, — letters from abroad: a black seal was upon one of them; and as I saw it, at once I felt that my uncle was dead. A gush of purer and more sacred sorrow than had ever yet sprung from my eyes or wrung my heart, overcame for a while the selfish fears and sufferings of my soul. But even my grief for him, — the kindest though the sternest of friends, — was not unmixed with dark and bitter associations. It was a strange fear that seized me: *I was weakened by suffering*, and a superstitious dread took pos-

session of me. He was gone, and he had been deceived to the end; he had mourned over his child long and deeply, and had died in ignorance of my share in her death; but now, his disembodied spirit seemed to haunt and accuse me; and that first link which connects us with the unknown world, by the loss of one we love, was to me a dreadful as well as a solemn thought. "His last words," thus wrote my aunt, "his last words were of you; he raised himself with difficulty in his bed, and with a strong effort pronounced your name, and then, after another struggle, added, 'Tell her to make Edward happy;' after this, he held my hand in his for a few minutes; once he pressed it, a change came over his face, and then he died in perfect peace. Oh, my Ellen, to die must be a dark and dreadful thing to those who have lived without God in the world! but to die as he did is not terrible; for his life had been void of offence, and irreproachable, as far as a human being's can be, and his death was indeed the death of the righteous." Edward, a voice from the grave calls upon me to make you happy. Where are you, that I may lie at your feet and fulfil that dying charge? Where are you, that I too may die in peace, nor close my eyes for ever without a word of pity or of pardon from you?

Twice I read over my aunt's letter, and then I opened Edward's. He had not reached Hyéres before my uncle's death: and had met Mrs. Middleton on her way back to England: he was travelling home with her, and meant to precede her by a few days to London, which he intended to reach by the twenty-third of the month. He said she was powerfully and deeply affected by the loss she had sustained; but that she was calm and composed, and only intensely anxious to be with me again. He said he had received my letter, and concluded his with an earnest request that I would take care of my health. I might then expect him in two days; —I should see him again whom my soul worshipped,— him whom I loved with a strength of passion and a fervour of devotion which absorbed every feeling of my heart; — and yet no faithless wife, no guilty woman, ever looked to the return, or *anticipated the* presence, of the husband she had betrayed, with *more nervous* terror, or more deep depression, than I did Edward's.

His letter was in my hand, and I was gazing intently upon it, when the door opened, and Henry came in. The blood forsook my cheek, and I gasped for breath. Mr. Middleton's death — his sister's grief — his pale and haggard expression of countenance — a vague hope that he was come, at last, to set me free for ever — kept me silent and subdued. He sat down opposite to me, and said, "I have forced my way in, and brought you this letter."

Glancing at the table, he added, "You have received the last account, I see. Has my sister written to you?"

I could not speak, but I took her letter and put it into his hands. He read it, and then laid it down with a deep sigh.

"He used me hardly, and hated the sight of me; but I respected him, and would fain have seen his life prolonged for Mary's sake."

There was a long pause after this; we were afraid of each other, and of what each might say next. It was now three weeks since we had met; an eternal separation was at hand; it rested with Henry to decide *how* we should part. Would he break the chain with which he had bound me? or would he leave upon me for ever the mark of my abhorred slavery? I stood before him, and fixed my eyes upon him.

"Henry, the moment is come when we must part."

"Part!" he exclaimed. "Do you think I am come to part with you? Do you imagine that I will leave you and Edward — whom I now hate as much as I once loved him — to exult over my despair, and to banish me from your house after mine has been turned into a hell —"

"What words do you dare to utter? Do not blaspheme. Your house is sanctified by the presence of an angel."

"It is haunted by a fiend, Ellen, — that woman who betrayed us, — that woman who, in one of her paroxysms of rage, broke open my desk, and drew from it those fatal letters which she sent to Edward in the vain hope of separating us for ever. She it was who intercepted and destroyed the letter you wrote to me a fortnight ago; and she had the audacity to admit this iniquity, when last night I charged her *with it.* She gloried in the act, and cast back *in my teeth the reproaches I* addressed to her. Then, in my fury,

I spoke out. I tore aside the veil from Alice's eyes. I broke my promises. I told the mother of my child why, and how, I had married her. I saw her tremble with horror, and turn from me with shuddering aversion, when I proclaimed in her pure ears my guilty passion for you, and my resolution, strong as death, never to give you up. I have broken every tie; I have renounced every duty; and now you *must* be mine — you *shall* be mine. I have long been your slave, but I knew it must come to this at last. You have struggled in vain; you cannot escape me. My love must be the bane of your life or its joy — its ruin or its glory; and unrequited as it has been, it yet has stood, and will stand, between you and your husband to the day of your death, and turn your wedded joys into deadly poisons."

"Your power is gone — your threats are vain; I defy your vengeance; I scorn your hatred. Denounce me to the world and to Edward. Tell them all that it was not love, but terror that made me tremble before you. Tell them that you have tortured me, and that I have writhed in agonies under your secret power. Tell them that my soul has been wrung — that my heart has been bruised. Tell them that you have changed my nature and made me what I am; and then let Edward, and the world, and Heaven itself, judge between you and me."

"You defy my vengeance? You scorn my hatred? Am I not *here*, weak and imprudent woman? Have you not written to me letters of frantic entreaty? Have you not broken the commands of your despotic and jealous husband? You have not been wise in your anger, or prudent in your wrath."

"You have no power against me if I confess the whole truth to Edward, — if I kneel at his feet —"

"And perjure yourself!"

"Oh, talk not to me of perjury, — talk not to me of crime. You have steeped yourself in guilt and iniquity; and be my sin what it may, upon *your* head it shall rest if you drive me to this act, — if you refuse to release me —"

A dreadful smile curled Henry's lip; and he said, with a sneer, "What an admirably got-up story this will be for Edward! It is a pity you did not think of it sooner. It would have appeared more

plausible than it will *now* do. An accidental homicide, carefully suppressed for four years, and confessed, at last, for the purpose of accounting for our intimacy! Your husband will admire the fertility of your brain and your powers of invention, which, by the way, he seems, from the tenor of his letter, to be pretty well acquainted with."

"Henry, your malice, your wickedness, *cannot* extend as far as this. You are not a demon; and it would be diabolical to refuse your testimony to my confession; besides, there are other witnesses —"

"In *your* interest, no doubt," retorted Henry with another sneer. "I shall certainly not admit that I allowed Edward to marry a woman whom I saw with my own eyes murder his cousin."

"Murder! murder my cousin! Is it you that speak? Is it I who hear you? Are there no limits — merciful Heaven! — are there no limits to this man's wickedness?"

"There are no limits to despair. I struggle for life and death. You think of nothing but the misery you suffer. You have no mercy for that which you inflict. If I give way to you now, I lose you for ever, and —"

He stopped and hid his face in his hands; his breast heaved with convulsive emotion. I felt he was softened, and I flung myself on my knees before him.

"You lose your victim, but you gain a friend, who, though she may never see you, will bless you every day of her life; and, as she kneels in penitence before God, will mix your name with hers in every prayer she breathes."

I clasped my hands in supplication, and sought to read into his soul.

"Never to see you? — never to hear your voice? — No, no — you *must* love me, — you *shall* love me; and even if you hate me you shall be mine. Your fierce beauty, your pride, your scorn, have not subdued me; nor shall your streaming eyes and trembling accents avail you now. I love you more passionately in your grief than in your pride; and, prostrate before me, I adore you as I never adored you before. I could kill you if at this moment you named Edward; and the curse of a broken oath, the mysterious

guilt of perjury, be upon your soul if you play me false, and place the last barrier of separation between yourself and me."

"Oh, do not go with such words in your mouth; — do not leave such a curse behind you: it will fall upon your own head, and follow you to your death-bed. Henry, I cling to your feet! — I implore your mercy —" * * *

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Was it the angel of death? — was it the vision of judgment that passed before me? Was it Edward I saw? — and did I live over that hour? I must have seen him — for never since that day, in dreams or in thought, have I beheld him without that dreadful expression which haunts and pursues me. It deprived me of my senses then — it has been killing me ever since.

When I came to myself, I was in my own room, and all the women in the house were about me; they looked frightened and curious, and spoke to each other in a low voice.

"Who is in the house? Who is here?" I asked with a trembling voice.

"There 's nobody here, Ma'am; Mr. Middleton is gone out; and the carriage, which had driven to the door, is gone to the Clarendon Hotel."

"Give me my bonnet and shawl. Make haste."

I attempted to get up, but my strength failed me.

"Bring me some wine directly."

I drank a large glassful and stood up. As I was tying on my bonnet with trembling hands, a servant knocked at the door, and put a letter into my maid's hand. I turned faint at the sight of it, but took it from her and bade her leave me.

There are moments which we live through, but which we cannot speak of. I read these words; I read them every day: —

"This is the last communication I shall ever make to you. I shall not return to my house till you have left it. I will never see you again, or hear your name pronounced, as long as I live. *Your own fortune*, and any allowance you may desire out of mine, *will be remitted* to you by my solicitors in the manner you will

direct; should you address any letters to me, they will be returned to you unopened."

I did not faint again; I did not shed a single tear; a dreadful weight oppressed my limbs and checked my breathing; the source of tears was dried up within me; I groaned in spirit; I expected nothing; I hoped nothing. I did not dare to take a step forward; my eyes were fixed on those words, "Leave my house for ever. I never will see you again." If I stirred, it was to go for ever! and it could not be; it must not be. I had *not* seen him for the last time; life was *not* over with me; I was *not* condemned to that death of the soul, an endless separation; nor sentenced to a living grave, with a heart still throbbing with ardent and passionate affection.

Would no one help me? Would no one have mercy upon me? Was there no voice that he would listen to,—no appeal that would reach him? There *was* one whom I had wronged; but whose image rose before me in that hour of despair; there *was* one whom I would seek, and who would plead for me, with Edward on earth, and with God in Heaven. I would go to her, and if *her* cold, pale hands were laid upon my burning brow, if *her* voice, like a moist, refreshing wind, passed through the fiery furnace of my affliction, I should not die but live — I should weep at her feet, not writhe and agonise alone.

I rose from my knees; I smoothed my hair, and drew my shawl round me. I had lost my gloves, and opened a drawer to look for them; the only pair I could find was one which Edward had made me put aside because he disliked their colour. What his letter had not done, — what the horrible sufferings of the last hour had not done, — this trifling circumstance did. I cried bitterly; and the pressure on my brain subsided. I walked rapidly through the hall, and as the porter opened the door, he stopped me and said, "Shall not John go with you, Ma'am?" I shook my head and darted on; but before he had closed the door, I came back to say, "I shall be home again in an hour." Why did I do so? Oh, because in its anguish *the heart* is weak, and I needed to tell myself *that I was not going for ever.*

To walk through the crowded streets, with a horrible grief in one's heart, and a dizzy aching in one's head; to push by happy, careless, busy creatures, and have a dreadful question shoot across one's brain of eternity, — of infinity, — which is answered by nothing but a vague though acute sense of suffering; — to meet the vacant stare, or the bow of recognition, when the head is splitting and the heart breaking; — who is there that has known all this? *I have;* and dreams have not pictured anything worse; though mine have been dreadful enough!

I walked fast; but the flagstones seemed to extend under my feet, and each carriage that whirled along, might be bearing Edward away. Once a travelling chariot dashed past me; I uttered a faint cry, and rushed towards it; the bystanders looked round in astonishment, and, as it turned the corner, I saw Mr. Escourt's face; he smiled and bowed.

I reached the house at last, and rang the bell. I waited long, and the maid who opened the door stared at me in silence. I ran by her, and up the narrow stairs. She followed me and laid hold of my arm, "You cannot see her; the child is dead." I staggered, and leant against the wall; before me, pale as a sheet, but with eyes which flashed fire, like an apparition, stood Mrs. Tracy; her withered features were convulsed, and the sound of her voice was horrible.

"Darken not these doors with your presence; the curse of Cain is upon you; his mark is on your forehead; and the vengeance of Heaven shall overtake you! The voice of the murdered child calls it down upon you from her watery grave! The last convulsive struggle of the babe who died this morning cries out against you! Ay, tremble and turn pale, and fall upon your knees, for your turn shall come at last! You shall weep, who have made others weep! You shall be trampled upon, who have trampled upon others! Your husband shall discard you! your vile lover shall forsake you; and when my child — when my Alice is dead —"

"Dead! Alice! Good God! Is *Alice* in danger?"

"*In danger*! Did you think that — betrayed, insulted, forsaken, with a child at her breast, and a dagger in her heart —

my flower, my treasure, my child, would live? You have murdered her! Go, go to Henry Lovell, tell him that his child is dead, that his wife is dying; and the curse of a bereaved mother, the agonies of long lingering years of remorse, the hatred of life, and the terror of death, be upon you both! And may the Almighty, to whom vengeance belongs, pour down upon your guilty heads the full vials of His wrath!"

I closed my eyes, and murmured "God forbid." When I opened them again, she was gone: the maid was holding the street-door open, and I walked out of the house. As I got into the street I grew dizzy, and caught hold of the railing. A hand was stretched out to me, and supported me for an instant. I recovered myself, and saw that it was Robert Harding on whom I was leaning. I started back, and looked into his face with wild affright. "Shall I call a coach for you?" he said, gently. I bowed my head in assent, and he went to fetch one. When it came, he let down the step and put me in. As he did so, I pointed to the window and said, "Will she die?"

"God only knows that," he answered in a gruff voice. "You seem like to die too; and well you may!"

I bade the coachman drive me home; and all the way I repeated to myself in a low voice — *home, home;* and when we reached it, I hardly dared to enter again that house from which Edward had banished me. The porter put into my hand some notes and letters. I took them, and, for the last time, went up to my own room. It was getting dark, and I rang for candles. I looked at the letters in my hand with a sort of vague groundless hope, that something in them might alter the dreadful certainty of my fate. The servant swept the hearth, and put on fresh coals, and then asked, "Do you expect Mr. Middleton home to dinner, Ma'am?"

I could not say no; I could not speak; I shook my head, and made a sign to him to go; and when the door was closed upon him, I flung myself with my face on the ground, and wept in anguish of spirit.

Then, for the first time, I asked myself what I should do, where I should go. To speak *to* any one I had ever known before, *to justify myself to any one but* to Edward, to leave his house for

that of any friend or acquaintance, was impossible. Condemned and discarded by him, I had no other thought, but as a wounded animal to creep to some corner of the world, and die there in silence.

I glanced at the letters before me; one was an invitation for the Wednesday in the following week. My name and Edward's were joined together, as they *never* would be again. The details of that every-day happiness of life, which was for ever destroyed, rose before me; and my heart rebelled against its fate, and murmured against God. I opened the next; it was from Henry. The image of his dying and childless wife was before me; and I shuddered as I read these lines:

"Your character is gone, your reputation is lost, you are for ever parted from Edward. Nothing remains to you now but the proffered devotion of my whole life. I have not returned to my detested home since the last scene that drove me from it, and never shall again. As long as you live I shall be at your side; wherever you go I shall follow you. There is a wild joy in my heart, for our destiny is accomplished; and henceforward we must be all in all to each other. Ellen, idol of my soul, you shall be mine. The excess of my love must win back love at last. Write me one line; tell me where you go; what you do. Life has not strength, language has not words, for this tumultuous fever of agitation, for this hour of love and terror, of anguish and of joy."

I tore open the next letter, and read as follows:

"My blessed child, I shall see you to-morrow, and I can feel *almost* happy in that prospect. You and Edward occupied your uncle's last thoughts; and on you both he pronounced his last blessing. The sight of your mutual happiness, your devotion to each other, will seem to me a tribute to his memory, and a consolation to my own sorrows. Edward has been as a son to me in my affliction, and I like to think that in you he possesses the greatest blessing that my grateful tenderness could desire for him.

"I whish I could feel happy about Henry and Alice; I had hoped that the birth of their child would have made him more do*mestic, and* drawn them more closely together; but, except a few *hurried lines* in which he announced the fact to me, and another

short letter since, I have heard nothing from him; and I have received a strange one from her grandmother. She insists upon seeing me immediately on my return to England, and speaks of communicating some dreadful secret to me. If I did not think her mad, this would frighten me; but her language and conduct ever since the marriage have been so strange, that I suspect she must be out of her mind. I shall go to Henry's house at once on my arrival to-morrow; and by the middle of the day I hope to be once more with you, my beloved and precious child. The past is sad, the future is gloomy; I have many fears and disquietudes; but *you* are my light in darkness, my bird of peace amid the storms of life; and in *your* happiness I shall forget my own sorrows. Give my best love to dearest Edward.

"Ever your most affectionate,

"M. M."

The cup was full at last; I was drinking it to the dregs; what wonder if it turned my brain? Banished for ever by Edward — persecuted by Henry's fatal passion — denounced to Mrs. Middleton — accused of murder — what was I doing here? Could I not walk out, and, in the black cold depths of the river, still for ever the passionate beating of that heart which had throbbed so long? Could I not swallow poison; and, in the agonies of death, send for Edward?

Death! No; I dared not die! I was afraid to die; but I would seek a living grave. I would fly from the face of those who loved, and of those who hated me.

Edward had forbidden my name to be uttered before him. Never again should it be uttered as the name of a living creature. I would take another, and bury myself in a seclusion where I might linger through the increasing symptoms of that illness which, during the last few days, I had detected and recognised by the hectic spots on my cheeks, by a racking cough, and nightly sweats. There I should live alone, suffer alone, and die alone; and when the record of my death, if recorded at all, should casually meet the eyes of those who once loved me, it would pass unnoticed; and my own *name, my fatal name, if* ever pronounced by them, would sound

as the knell of blighted joys — of hopes gone by — as the memory of a mysterious shame, and of a nameless sorrow.

My eyes turned accidentally to a painting of the Cathedral at—, which hung over the chimney-piece in my room. A superstitious and nervous fancy took possession of me. I felt as if my fate directed me there. I turned my eyes away, and tried to *think*, but could not. A vague terror pursued me; and still, as I fixed my eyes on this picture, I felt as if *there*, among those solemn arches, in those dim aisles, I should be *safe*. I felt as if a mountain would be removed from my breast as soon as I had reached a place where my name and my fate were unknown. *There*, Henry would not pursue me; *there*, I should never be told that Alice was dead, and that I had destroyed her; *there*, I should never hear that Mrs. Middleton had learnt to hate me; *there*, she would never ask me what I had done with her child; and miles and miles would lie between me and *him*, whom I so hopelessly loved, and so wildly feared.

The hours went by, and each time the clock struck I startled with affright; but I grew calmer as the night advanced; I had something to do, for my strange vague fancy was changed into a settled resolve.

I fetched a small portmanteau, and put into it some linen and some money, Edward's miniature, and a small prayer-book, which he had once given to me. My cough was dreadful, and shook me to pieces; but I listened to its hollow sound with a terrible joy; and as I counted the bank-notes in my pocket-book, I wrote with a pencil on the back of the last — "For my burial."

The clock struck five, and I put on my bonnet and my cloak. The light was faintly dawning. I opened with a trembling hand the door of the adjoining room, and unclosed the shutters, to look once and for the last time on Edward's full-length picture. The light was so faint, and my swelled and burning eyes were so dim, that I could hardly discern its features, and I saw nothing before me but the vision of that dreadful moment when I last beheld him, I knelt before it, and breathed a prayer for *him*, which will be heard at the throne of Grace, if prayers can avail from the lips of *those who cannot*, and dare not, pray for themselves.

A noise in the room above my head startled and hurried me. I took up the portmanteau in my room, and carried it with difficulty down the stairs; I reached the hall door, and pushed it open — I closed it behind me; and, if ever there was a pang which baffles description — if ever there was an act which resembles suicide, in all but the apparent suspension of agony which death seems to yield, it was mine, when I closed that door; and, with a weakened frame, an aching head, and a broken heart, dragged myself with difficulty along the street, and stood shivering and burning at once, to wait till the first hackney-coach appeared on the stand.

I called one, and drove to the place from which I had seen that the stage-coaches set off. I saw the name of — on one of them, and secured a place. An hour afterwards we started; and, as I drove out of London, it was snowing hard.

After a few hours' travelling, the burning fever which had supported me, subsided: and the horrible solitude of the future appalled me. Nothing like a hope before me — nothing but the cold chill of despair in my heart — nothing but strange voices and faces about me. A dark, heavy, speechless grief weighed like lead on my soul, but wrought like fire in my brain. * * * *

Late that night I reached this place. * * * * *

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From that moment to this, a night of horror has gathered around me. No tidings have reached, no enemy has pursued, no friend has discovered me. I am alone, and I am dying. I watch day by day the progress of the disease which is killing me. In reckless despair I accelerate its progress; and then I tremble and shudder at the approach of death. I drag myself to the cathedral, and in its awful silence, or in the low chaunting of the choir, I find a soothing power, which acts at times as a spell over the dark visions and secret terrors of my soul.

But I cannot pray when others pray. My brain is confused, and my spirit weary. I cannot kneel in mockery before God, while my soul rebels against Him. The voices of the dead and of the dying *mingle with the rise and* fall of the organ. Sometimes a note *vibrates on my ear like a* death-cry — the sound of rushing waters

besets me — the curse of Cain follows me, and his words of complaint are ever upon my lips — "My punishment is greater than I can bear!"

Is there no balm for such sorrows? No refuge for such despair? Tell me, ye who know; for verily, my soul is in great agony, and there is none to comfort me! I am passing through the Valley of the Shadow of Death, and God is not with me!

CONCLUSION.

"What angel shall
Bless this unworthy husband? He cannot thrive
Unless her prayers, whom Heaven delights to hear
And loves to grant, reprieve him from the wrath
Of greatest justice." SHAKSPEARE.

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* * * * *

"Love her, Angelo,
I have confessed her, and I know her virtue."
SHAKSPEARE.

"Une vie à bien faire uniquement passée
D'innocence, d'amour, d'espoir, de pureté,
Tant d'aspirations vers son Dieu répétées,
Tant de foi dans la mort, tant de vertus jetées
En gage à l'Immortalité.
"Tant de nuits sans sommeil pour veiller la souffrance,
Tant de pain retranché pour nourrir l'Indigence;
Tant de pleurs toujours prêts à s'unir à des pleurs,
Tant de soupirs brûlans vers une autre patrie,
Et tant de patience, à porter une vie,
Dont la Couronne était ailleurs." LAMARTINE.

On a cold evening in February, Mrs. Middleton was sitting one in the library of Elmsley Priory; the wind was howling round e old house in that mournful key which stirs up in the soul a gue emotion; the roaring of the swollen torrent was audible, id the low distant barking of the keeper's dogs chimed in with it. rs. Middleton was dressed in the deep mourning of a widow. ie was not more than forty, and yet her hair was prematurely ey, and the heavy listlessness with which one of her hands hung her side, and the other struck repeatedly and unconsciously the ble on which she leant, told that the spring within was broken, d *that suffering, and not* time, had done its work upon her.

An embroidering-frame was near her, and after a while she drew it to herself and began to work. When she had made a few stitches she let the needle fall, and her head sank upon the support of the frame, and there she remained buried in thought till the door at the end of the library was softly opened. She looked up eagerly, and gazed in silence on the beautiful being who was approaching her, and who after kissing her on the forehead sat down near her, and employed herself with the work she had given up.

And that lovely vision, what was she like? What did that pale smooth brow, those earnest eyes, that bloodless cheek, and delicate form resemble? A lily shattered by the storm; a dove scared from her nest, but faithful in her fear. An expression wholly at variance with the features that wear it, is a startling thing. Tears in the eyes of an old and iron-featured man; laughter on a pale and dying face; care and deep-seated sorrow in the round lineaments of childhood, make us wonder and grieve; but more at variance than any of these was the expression of Alice Lovell's beautiful features with the character they seemed made to bear. Intense and anxious watchfulness marked it now, a tremulous quiver shook her hand as she drew the threads through the canvas; and though her large eyes were calm, and her attitude composed, the least sound made her start.

"How is he now?" inquired Mrs. Middleton in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

"Sleeping, thank God, and quietly too. Oh, Mrs. Middleton, hope is strong within me yet, and strength will be given us never to forsake him."

"Hope! strength! Alice, where are they to be found?"

Alice pointed to the sky and then to her own heart, and said, "*There* and *here*. In quietness and in confidence shall be our strength." After a pause she resumed, "You were with him some time to-day, did he speak to you?"

Mrs. Middleton grew paler still at this question, and bowed her heat in assent.

"What did he say?" continued Alice. "Oh, do not spare *me!* — do not think of *me!* What did *he* say?"

Mrs. Middleton joined her hands together and exclaimed,

"'Where is she? Where is she?' was what he said. Again and again he repeated these words in a tone of indescribable anguish, and I was almost thankful when his mind wandered again, and I could leave his dreadful question unanswered. Alice, my child, I am so weak, and you are so strong in your faith, in your hope, in your boundless charity, that I must give way before you, and for once ask you in mercy to let me speak of *her*. I could kneel on her grave and pray to be resigned; but now as it is I grow wild with terror —"

"Oh, let us speak of her, and let us pray for her; let us never have another secret fear, another unspoken terror. Let us pray that in this world she may still be blessed, or in a better she may have been mercifully received."

"You do not understand me yet, Alice. *He* does. The same horrible fear has darted through his mind, darkened and clouded as it is. Her own deed; her own hand, ... Alice, you never guessed the extent of his misery or of mine."

"Never guessed it, Mrs. Middleton? I have been with him in his hours of fierce delirium; I have been with him when he has taken me for *her*, and addressed to me words which have made my blood run cold; words of guilty love and of horrible remorse. I have lived between you and him during these days of darkness and agony. I have seen your hope die, and your terror grow; and do I not know what your fear is? — Suicide! Yes, let me speak the word at once, let me dive into your inmost thoughts, and let me carry consolation even into that extremity of misery. Who can declare the point where despair becomes *madness?* Who shall judge? Who shall condemn? Who can tell the secret things of the soul save the God who made it? He has set no limits to our prayers; and shall we say to His mercy, so far shalt thou go and no further?"

They knelt together, those two women; they poured forth their souls in prayer, and when they rose from their knees, and the elder of them leant her forehead against the breast of the younger and wept in silence, she blessed her in her heart; and she was right to bless her, for nobly and tenderly had Alice Lovell borne her part through the heavy trials that had assailed her. We heard

of her last on the bed of sickness, and death was drawing near to her; but youth, and strength of body and mind carried her through, and when she rose from her couch of weakness and of pain, it was to hurry to the bed-side of the husband who had forsaken her, and who, after some days of agonised search after the victim of his relentless passion, maddened by the conviction that he had destroyed her, and haunted by an indescribable remorse, had lost in a brain-fever all consciousness save of some intolerable anguish, and of that endless remorse. For many days he hovered between life and death, while his pale wife stood by his side and held his burning hand in hers; even while he raved in dreadful delirium of his love and his despair, and with frantic cries called upon the grave to give up its dead. She was indeed a ministering angel in that house of mourning, for there was another fierce but now subdued spirit, who without daring to approach the bed of suffering, was undergoing all the anguish of the blow she had struck, and which had recoiled upon herself. It was a fearful sight to see that old woman crying like a child over the ruin she had made, wringing her hands in despair, and with straining eyes and blanched cheeks, listening at the door of the room where the being, whom she had nursed as a child, and idolised as a man, whose passions she had fostered, whose life she had saved and embittered, to whom she had confided her child, and whom she had at last ruined by her blind and furious revenge, was raving, cursing, and dying. Between them stood that child whom she had sacrificed, and he had betrayed. With words of peace and of holy confidence, passing from one to the other, Alice spoke of hope and pardon, and turned the agony of the aged sufferer into penitence. By degrees she learnt from her lips all the secrets of her soul. From her she gathered the knowledge of that dark cloud which had hung over Ellen's life, and while she trembled and wept, in her heart there rose (as Mrs. Middleton had said) an immense pity, a boundless charity. Day by day she watched and prayed by Henry's side, and at last discerned a ray of light through the gloom. The fever left him, and one day that she had supported his head for several weary hours, he opened his languid eyes and said, "Alice, is it you?"

She pressed upon his cheek a kiss, like a mother's to a rescued

child; but when he whispered in her ear the terrible question on which his life and his reason depended, her face was as pale as his, and her tears fell like rain-drops on his brow. Gradually his strength returned, but still at times his mind wandered. For hours he would remain with his eyes fixed on vacancy, and his lips would move as if unconsciously, and form the fatal words of inquiry which never received an answer. Sometimes he took Alice for Ellen, and kneeling at her feet he would implore her pardon, and curse and upbraid himself as her murderer and destroyer. With heroic patience, but with a sickening heart and a shuddering frame she listened to these ravings, and met his wild and involuntary confessions with a silent appeal to Heaven for mercy for him, and for strength for herself.

After a while she went with him to Elmsley, and there continued her work of love and endurance. Her strength seemed to increase with the demands upon it. Mrs. Middleton's broken spirit, and helpless despondency, needed her support almost as much as Henry's weakened mind. Her grandmother had returned to the cottage at Bridman, and nothing cheered the solitude of that melancholy abode, but the occasional visits of that angel who moved amidst all these various sufferings and dark associations like a messenger of peace. It was a hard task, and many a martyr's palm has perchance been more easily won. She became identified with all their sorrows — almost with the remorse she witnessed; perhaps she suffered more than any of them, for she knew more than any one else of that terrible history which had driven Henry to madness, and Ellen (as she supposed) to self-destruction. Through her grandmother's tardy and unavailing misgivings, she learnt the details of that obstinate belief in the lost Ellen's guilt which had led her to hate and persecute her. She heard from her lips how that sentiment had grown into a passion when fostered by a bitter and burning resentment; how, under the influence of that feeling, she had one night made her way into the house at Elmsley at dusk, with the intention of upbraiding Henry, and denouncing Ellen. She had found her alone, and asleep before the organ on which she had been playing. A savage *hatred filled her soul*, and she bent over that sleeping form with

a fierce impulse to revenge upon her at once the death of Julia, and Henry's desertion of her own child. Conscience and terror alike checked her uplifted arm; she withdrew in silence, but left behind her the first of that series of mysterious threats, by which she haunted the mind, and scared the peace of that wretched and deeply-tried being. She confessed to Alice how she had employed and excited Robert Harding to act the part of a spy, to dodge the steps and watch the actions of her faithless husband, and of the unhappy object of his fatal passion. A superstitious belief in a mysterious call to denounce and to visit the crime she had witnessed, constantly counteracted by the influence which Henry possessed over her, and an intense anxiety for the innocent girl she had committed to his reckless hands, had kept her in a state of mind bordering on distraction. Harding was one of those men, who, dogged and obstinate in one respect, was weak and manageable in all others. He blindly followed her dictates, as long as she persuaded him that her aim was to protect or to avenge Alice, whom he loved with an instinctive, faithful, and humble devotion. He shared her hatred of Ellen, and on the day of her marriage had mixed with the crowd at the church door, and thrust into her hand that warning which had been so awfully realised. At the time of the election at —, he had watched from the gallery where he stood, with a strange mixture of grief and rage, Alice's altered countenance, and her husband's open and shameless devotion to her rival. He had in his possession one of those letters which Mrs. Tracy had so often written and then recalled; he resolved to deliver it at once, and thus bring sudden disgrace and misery upon that guilty pair whose destiny was in his hands. When he had done the deed, and retired to his solitary abode at Bridman, he felt frightened at what he had hazarded, and trembled like a child at the idea of Mrs. Tracy's anger. It was, therefore, a relief to him when Henry sought him out, and humbled himself before him. He was released from an awful responsibility, and returned to his post, supported by his aunt's bounty, obedient to her orders, and with a dog-like, self-denying fidelity, ready to die at Alice's feet, to kill *her husband*, or to save his life at the expense of his own, according as he was told that *she* willed it — that she required it. During

the time he was in Mr. Escourt's service he might have been betrayed into more active steps, had he not detected, with a keen and instinctive jealousy, the motive which dictated his patron's sharp investigations, and the object he had in view; which, with a singular mixture of cunning and honesty, he contrived to defeat.

Mrs. Tracy described to Alice, in tones and with looks that made her shudder, how her spirit was moved, even at the altar where Ellen's ill-omened marriage was solemnised, to denounce that pale, stern bride as a homicide, and to proclaim aloud that the trembling hand which one man bestowed, and another received, with such loving trust, was stained with blood. She had risen to speak; the words were upon her lips:

> "Phrenzy to her heart was given,
> To speak the malison of Heaven,"

when she met the full and glaring force of Henry's flashing eyes. She could not withstand their dark and dreadful power; Alice, her helpless child, was by his side, and she sunk back in her seat, overcome and subdued. On the day of Alice's confinement her hopes had been raised, and her heart softened, by some indications of sensibility on Henry's part. The reaction was violent when he returned after an absence of several hours, which she knew had been devoted to Ellen. She reproached and upbraided him, and he answered her by a careless and brutal avowal of the nature of his feelings, and he left the house again at dinner-time without even visiting his wife. Then in her fury she resolved at all risks to separate him from Ellen; she broke open his desk, where she found notes which excited her hatred and anger to such a degree that she determined to send them at once to Edward Middleton, and thus place an eternal barrier between the guilty pair. The result of that fatal act she now deplored with a ceaseless and bitter sorrow, and day after day, with tears and groans, entreated the forgiveness of her thrice-injured child. Patiently and mercifully did Alice listen to that misguided and unhappy woman's confessions; she abstained by a reproachful look or a severe word from heaping fresh misery on that aged and humbled head, but she *pondered over these things* in silence; and when she returned to

Henry's side and he held out his hand to greet her, hers was cold and nervous, and her heart sunk within her as she fixed her eyes on his, and in their wild and restless expression read that fearful retribution which sometimes falls on those who have walked in their own ways, and defied the justice of an Almighty Judge, till the light that was in them has become darkness, and His awful vengeance has overtaken them. Great indeed was that darkness in Henry Lovell's case — greater still from the light that had once been in him. Sparks of genius, touches of feeling, relics of the high capabilities of mind that had once been his, flashed through the night of his soul, and made its present darkness more sadly visible.

Alas, for all that God gives and man destroys! Alas, for all that might be and is not! Genius and intellect, which should subdue and regenerate worlds, and with noble thoughts, and words of fire, carry the truth from one hemisphere to the other — where are ye? What do ye? Consumed upon the altar of a withering selfishness — cramped and debased by the bonds of a narrow scepticism — man has prostituted you to vile uses. Slaves of his passions, and ministers of evil, He has made you; — and where God had said, "Let there be light," has too often answered, "Let there be darkness."

Henry's gloomy and wayward depression increased every day, although his intellect was not wholly obscured; but at the times that it was clearest, he seemed to suffer more than during its hours of partial aberration. He gave way less than at first to fits of violent irritation; the terrible expressions he used to utter, and the murmurs and curses which rose to his lips with such frightful bitterness, were at an end. He even ceased to ask that fatal question with which he had been wont to torture his wife and sister; he listened in silence to what they said, and once made a faint attempt to smile when Alice spoke cheerfully to him. He often gazed on her in silence, and watched her intently as she moved about the room. Once, when she was sitting at her work opposite to him, she heard him say, in a low voice, "*Notre Dame de bon secours.*" She looked up with tears in her eyes; he rose wildly, and cried,

"Your tears shall not avail you;" and then he turned away, and did not speak for some hours.

One morning that the sun was shining brightly, and the mild air forestalled the spring, Alice had thrown open a window that looked upon the flower-garden. A bird was chirping a few shrill notes near it; and Henry listened to them with an appearance of pleasure. When the bird flew away, he went to the window, and gazed earnestly on some early spring flowers, which were just coming into blossom. Alice opened a book on the table, and read aloud the following lines: —

"Sweet nurslings of the vernal skies,
Bathed in soft airs and fed with dew,
What more of magic in you lies
To fill the heart's fond view?
In childhood's sports, companions gay
In sorrow, on life's downward way,
How soothing! In our last decay,
Memorials prompt and true."

Henry held out his hand for the book, and read over these lines in silence; he then glanced at the title-page, shuddered, and flung it from him. Alice picked it up, and looked anxiously at him.

"Was not Dr. Dodd hung for forgery?" he exclaimed. She turned very pale. He saw it; and said, "You need not be frightened *now*. I am not *mad*. In that very book I *forged* the first link of that infernal chain with which I bound and destroyed her."

Alice knelt by him, and whispered —

"Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow."

He drew fiercely back, and cried —

"There may be mercy for others; there can be none for me. Look into your Bible, you will see in it what I have done. Turned her body and her soul into hell! God alone should do *that*. *I* have done it. Alice, if you believe, you must tremble. Ay, the devils do so too. Poor angel! God has turned thee into an earthly hell. Pure spirit! chained to a fiend, thy fiery trial draws to an end."

He sank back into his chair, and muttered —

"The worm that never dies. Ay, I understand it now."

One day that Alice had been walking before breakfast, and was returning home with that heaviness of step, and abstraction from outward things, which prolonged and acute mental suffering produces, the porter's wife stopped her as she passed the lodge, to tell her that half an hour before a gentleman had come to the gate in a post-chaise, and had expressed an anxious desire to see her; that on finding she was out, he had hesitated a moment as to what he should do, but that at last he had stepped into the lodge, and written a letter, which he had desired her to deliver to Mrs. Lovell as soon as she returned. Alice took it with a mixture of fear and curiosity. The only conjecture she could form was, that it came from Edward Middleton. The unbroken solitude in which he had lived — the obstinate silence which he had maintained when Mrs. Middleton once ventured to address a few lines to him, imploring him to aid her in the search of his guilty but unfortunate wife — made her break the seal of this letter with nervous anxiety.

She glanced at the signature, and, at once relieved and disappointed, she saw it was not from him, and then read as follows: —

"MADAM,

"As one who, in his ministry, has received from dying lips a solemn confession — as a man who has witnessed a deep repentance, and a great affliction, I address you.

"There is one who has been for a while as if she had been dead to you and yours, but who is yet alive, although her life is passing away like a morning cloud. In His name, who never broke the bruised reed, I ask you to smooth her pillow, and to bring peace and pardon to that weary spirit. She has made the sacrifice of her life to God; and her only desire is to be forgiven by those whom she has trespassed against, and to forgive those who have trespassed against her. I dare not say more. Just, it is hardly possible that you *can* be; merciful, I am certain that you *will* be. Mrs. Edward Middleton is at —; she is in the last stage of a rapid consumption, and before many days are gone by, her spirit will have *returned to* the God who gave it. She has confessed to me the sins *and the sorrows* of her short and troubled life. One heavy trial

she has been spared, in the knowledge that your life, Madam, has been saved; and if she could receive from you, from her aunt, and, above all, from the husband whom she has offended, a token of forgiveness, her life might still close (I use her own expression) 'with one untroubled hour.' I heard her murmur these last words to herself, as, out of a nosegay, which had been in kindness sent her, she selected a passion-flower, the sight of which affected her strangely.

"I have undertaken this journey for the sole purpose of informing you of Mrs. Middleton's present residence. I shall await your answer at the inn at Elmsley. My reason for addressing this letter to you, Madam, was the fear of causing Mrs. William Middleton too sudden an emotion in her present state of health. To your hand I commit the task, and I pray that you may be guided and blessed in the performance of it.

"WILLIAM LACY."

Alice had begun to read this letter as she was walking towards the house; but as soon as she had read the few first lines, and that the sense of them burst upon her, she staggered to a bench, and a great faintness came over her. She read on, however; and, as the letter ended with that prayer for her which had been so fervently put up, she closed her eyes for an instant, and said *Amen* with her whole heart.

The letter had rolled at her feet, and as she stooped for it, her husband suddenly joined her. He picked it up, and asked whence it came. She trembled and turned pale. He saw it, and guessed it all. He seized her hands, and looked wildly into her face —

"Is she alive?"

"She is, Henry, she is."

He fell with his face to the ground, and for the first time in his life his soul spoke to God.

When he arose he was very pale, but he took the letter from Alice's hand, and read it through in silence. "Not dead, but dying!" He hid his face in his hands and wept convulsively.

"Alice," he cried at last, as his wife bent over him in speech-

less sympathy, "Alice, my guardian angel! never forsake me—never leave me! Teach me to live; teach me to die; teach me to see *her* die, and not to blaspheme and to curse. Put your hand on my forehead, and drive away the dreadful thoughts that come over me. . . . She is dying; she is alone: what are we doing here? Alice, I must see this man, this priest; quick, quick—send him to me; there is no time to lose."

There was a wildness in Henry's countenance and manner which alarmed Alice. She walked fast with him to the house, and despatched a groom to the inn with an earnest entreaty to Mr. Lacy that he would come to them directly. She then went to Mrs. Middleton, and, with tenderness and caution, informed her of that glad, mournful news, which relieved her worst fears, only by summoning her to the deathbed of that Ellen whom she so passionately loved, and whose name vibrated in her ear, and thrilled through her heart, with a strange and undying power. She rose as from a deep sleep, and prepared to go to her; but there was no gladness in the revival of her fainting spirit, and no hope in the pilgrimage before her.

An hour afterwards Henry Lovell received Mr. Lacy in his room. He had spoken kindly and tenderly to Mrs. Middleton. When Alice met him, overcome by the sense of all that they two alone as yet knew and felt, and by an instinctive dread of the interview about to take place with Henry, she fell on her knees before him; he laid his hand upon her head, and said in a voice which trembled with emotion —

"The blessing of an old man be upon you, my daughter; and may the God whose servant I am never forsake you in life or in death."

Alice rose and fixed her earnest eyes on Mr. Lacy's venerable countenance, and said slowly and solemnly —

"You have brought us tidings of mournful joy, and you will carry back with you tidings of peace and of hope to poor Ellen's dying spirit. Oh, Mr. Lacy, have you not a blessing to leave *behind you*? Have you no words of peace to speak to him, even to *him who is* now waiting for you? I know not in what spirit he will

receive you. Dark shades sweep over his soul, and his sufferings are terrible. He is recovering slowly from a brain fever —"

Henry opened the door of the adjoining room. The colour of his face was changed; he looked quite unlike himself; and Alice started at the strange sound of his voice, when he said, "Do not detain Mr. Lacy, Alice: my time is short, and I have much to say to him."

Mr. Lacy followed him into his study; he shut the door, and begged him to sit down. He looked at him steadily for a minute, and then said —

"You know all my history?"

"Some parts of it," Mr. Lacy replied.

"You know, then, that you speak to a man who has destroyed, by a series of iniquitous persecutions, a woman whom he so devotedly loved that even now —"

"Mr. Lovell, I am not come here to listen to the avowal of an unholy passion; I am come to bring you that forgiveness which you so much need, and to claim from you a confession —"

"Stop, Mr. Lacy; you must listen to me, or you will drive me mad," said Henry, with a terrible laugh, "and then what confession will you get? Listen to me. I love Ellen Middleton so passionately, that were I not dying myself, I could not even now do her justice. Though two hours ago I fancied I could have given my existence only to know her alive and in her husband's arms, even though I might never see her again, yet *now — now* that I have heard of her, — that I see you who have seen her face and heard her voice, the dreadful struggles I go through only leave me life and sense enough to prove to you that I was in my right mind when I wrote *this*."

He held out a letter to Mr. Lacy, who took it in silence.

"Take that letter to Edward Middleton, Mr. Lacy; you may read it first yourself. If, when he reads it, he forgives his wife and curses me, I shall be satisfied. Tell him, then, that I am mad or dead; I shall be so by that time. When you see *her* again, tell her not to look so pale, or stare so wildly when I dream of her; tell her not to hang over me, or stand by my bedside and moan so *piteously*. *Did you say she* was dead?"

"No; she is dying; and she is prepared to die; she prays, she hopes, she submits, and God will receive her, for His mercy is infinite."

"A ministering angel she will then be, while I lie howling! A gulf between us! What am I thinking of? Where have I read that? There is something very wrong *here!* I beg your pardon, Mr. Lacy, I will not detain you a moment more. Perhaps you will be so kind as to let me know the result of your interview with Edward Middleton? and give my love to Ellen; I shall call upon her to-morrow."

There was something so horrible in the familiar tone with which these last words were spoken, that Mr. Lacy shuddered, and breathed a mental prayer for the wretched man whose senses seemed to have failed him after the strong and persevering effort he had made to collect them for one important object. In a few brief words he warned Alice, as he left him, of the wild and sudden manner in which their conversation had been broken off, and strongly urged her to send for instant medical advice. She did so; and after taking leave of him, and murmuring in an almost inaudible voice the words, "Pray for us!" she returned to her post with that sinking of heart, and strength of spirit, which those only know who feel acutely, and never give way. She did not inform Mrs. Middleton of the alarming symptoms which indicated the return of what they most dreaded. She would not, by rousing her fears, detain her from the death-bed of Henry's victim; she sent her there, as to a mournful refuge from the terrors she herself anticipated. When she had seen her take her departure, she knelt alone for a few minutes in her room before a picture of the Crucifixion, which hung there; she offered to God, in a few brief words, the agony she was about to endure; and then, with a steady step and a calm countenance, she walked into the room where Henry was, and sat down quietly to her work at a small distance from him. She saw by his eye and his countenance that he was struggling with the delirious fever which was coming upon him; and while she kept her hand near the bell, which at an *instant's notice* was to be answered, and her eye upon the avenue

through which she could see the doctor arrive, she spoke now and then in a quiet tone, and gently and firmly answered the wild questions he addressed to her. Once he called loudly and fiercely for music; he muttered something about David and his harp; he bade her drive the evil spirit from him; he began to speak rapidly and incoherently, and to chafe at her silence. She could not play; she had never sung to him before; for the first time, she did. Her voice was pure, and sweet, and loud; it rose in the silence of that twilight hour with a strange and awful harmony. She sang the airs of those sacred chaunts which fall on the ear like dreamings of eternity. Two old servants who were in the outward room fell on their knees and listened. For more than an hour that solemn, mournful song continued; it thrilled through their very souls, and affected them more deeply than the most passionate cries of grief or of terror could have done. It only ceased when the doctor arrived; and Henry was persuaded, in a moment of gloomy and indifferent abstraction, to retire to bed, and yield himself to his care. But no remedies, no treatment availed to check the progress of the fever, which increased every hour, and which was accompanied by the fiercest delirium, and the most frantic ravings. His struggles were fearful: his attempts at self-destruction frequent; three men could hardly hold him down. Towards morning, in one of those paroxysms of delirious fury, he broke a blood-vessel, and Alice, who had never left his bedside, was covered with blood. She stirred not even then; she saw in the doctor's face that the danger was imminent; for the prostration of strength which followed the accident was sudden and awful; and one of those indescribable changes which announce the approach of dissolution was apparent. She whispered to one of the servants to send for the clergyman, and then she knelt by the bed-side and gazed with an agonising intensity on Henry's deathly pale face. His eyes were closed in the helplessness of utter exhaustion, and his breath hardly dimmed the mirror that was held to his lips. After a few minutes of that nameless anguish which thought dares not dwell upon, nor words describe, she saw his eyes open and turn to her with an expression of intense *inquiry, full of the consciousness* of death, of the sense of a

coming eternity, and of that question, deferred too long, and asked too late, "What shall I do to be saved?"

She bent over him in speechless sorrow; his dying eyes caught sight of the cross which hung from her neck; she saw it; she held it to his lips, and whispered, "None ever perished at His feet."

He heard her; and his lips moved, and his hand grasped hers; he looked at her, raised his eyes to Heaven, — and he died.

On that murmured prayer, on that expiring glance, she built hopes which we may not scan, — which we dare not judge. We dare not break the bruised but not broken reed on which she leant, nor quench the uncertain light which its memory threw upon the remaining years of her earthly pilgrimage.

When the clergyman arrived, he found her still on her knees by the bed of death, still covered with the blood of her dead husband. He has often since said, that when she rose from her knees, and silently held out her hand to him, it was with a reverence mingled with awe that he took it. He felt (this was his expression) that she had drawn very near to God in the prayers which she had poured forth in that chamber of death, during its first and solemn hour of silence and of loneliness.

It was an irksome and trying task which Mr. Lacy, from a sense of duty, and of profound interest and pity, had undertaken; and the part of it which he most dreaded was now at hand. For those he had left behind, he felt the sincerest compassion, and for Alice, the highest admiration. When he had drawn near to Elmsley, he had formed beforehand a tolerably just idea of the situation and state of mind of its inmates. He had expected to find a woman bowed down with grief, worn out with sorrow, and by her side another, more like an angelic than a human being, and such were those he had seen. He had expected to find a man with a mind weakened, torn by a keen remorse, and still struggling with unconquered passions; he had heard with his own ears the confirmation of his anticipations, and he had left him sinking under that delirious agony which he had struggled with long, and *mastered* for one moment, but which had subdued him at last.

He had sent one of these sufferers to the bed-side of his dying penitent, and had left the others in God's hands, and had prayed earnestly for them, as he foresaw the dark and troubled scenes on which they were entering. But now, as he travelled from Elmsley to Hillscombe, he felt quite uncertain as to the character, and the state of mind, of the man whom he was seeking. Ellen's journal had given him a clear idea of every individual connected with her history save of that husband whom she had so loved, so feared, and so offended. Whether a strong principle of duty, or an implacable strength of resentment characterised him, he could not exactly discern; and he felt the difficulty of obtruding himself, a perfect stranger, into those sorrows which dignity, or pride, wounded affection, or stern implacability, had shrouded from every eye, and buried in that solitude which he was now on the point of disturbing.

With intense anxiety and curiosity he opened the letter which Henry Lovell had placed in his hands; and, according to his permission, proceeded to read it.

"This letter will be placed in your hands by a clergyman, who will at the same time inform you that I am dying, and that, as a dying man, I solemnly address you, and charge you to read the whole of this letter. Your wife is not dead; and on *my* death-bed I desire to do her that justice which I withheld from her so long, while she vainly sought for it at my hands. I have loved her passionately and for years; and if she had returned my affection, she would not be dying now of a broken heart, and I should not be on the brink of madness. Do not imagine that I am mad *now*. I am in the full possession of my senses; and if I could, or dared, thank God for anything, it would be for this interval of reason, which allows me to declare, with all the force of a death-bed assertion, that the woman, whom you have turned out of your house as my mistress, is as pure as she was on the fatal day when we both first saw her; and loves you with a passion which has made the misery of my life, which has baffled every effort I made to destroy her virtue, *and which she dies of* at last, blessing you, and hating *me as a woman; but, perhaps*, forgiving me as a Christian. Not

quite three years ago, a dreadful accident, an extraordinary train of circumstances, threw her into my power. I saw her in a fit of almost childish passion strike her cousin Julia; the child was standing in a dangerous position, her foot slipped, and she fell down the cliff; you know the rest; had you known it sooner you might now be the happy husband of the woman whom I adore. *You* too will know the meaning of those horrible words *too late*, which I have repeated to her in malice, and to myself in despair, till I feel as if they would ring in my ears through an eternity of misery. She wanted courage, she wanted opportunity, to accuse herself of the involuntary act which resembled murder in its results, and which, in the secret cogitations of her restless soul, and excited imagination, assumed a form of guilt and of terror which nothing could efface. *I* kept her secret! I forced Mrs. Tracy, (Alice's grandmother,) who was in my room, on some matters of business at the time, to keep it too. I devoted myself to my victim; I watched her continually; I read each emotion of her soul; I soothed her terrors; I flattered her; I made her believe, by a series of artful contrivances, that *you* were the possessor of her secret, and thus sought, by fear, by distrust, by every pang which that belief occasioned, to crush that passion, the dawn of which I had detected with rage and despair. Under that impression, she saw you depart with a resigned and sullen indifference; and for some months I thought myself, if not loved, at least liked, to a degree which justified my hopes and my designs. They were cruelly disappointed; — a fatal engagement, an entanglement in which guilt and folly had involved me, prevented my offering myself to her in any way but that of urging her to a secret marriage, which I proposed on the score of her uncle's implacable opposition. She steadily refused to yield to my passionate entreaties, and we parted with threats and upbraidings on my part, and contempt and defiance on hers. I was, of course, banished from Elmsley, and soon afterwards, for the purpose of saving myself from a threatened and disgraceful exposure, of a nature needless now to detail, I made a victim of that gentle and perfect Alice, who has almost as much *reason as* Ellen herself to curse the day on which I crossed her *path*. When I met the latter again, in London, some time after

my marriage, I began to use that power which accident had given me. She had then found out that you were not, as she had imagined, aware of the event which had so fearfully blighted her peace. I then avowed myself the possessor of her secret; and alternately as a friend and as a foe — by devotion one while, and by threats another — I forced her to endure my presence, — to tolerate the expression of a passion, against which her heart revolted, but which she dared not peremptorily repel. I employed every art which cunning can devise to entangle and to bind her. In Mrs. Tracy's knowledge of her secret, and violent enmity against her, I held an engine which I skilfully turned to my purpose. I bound her by an oath never to reveal to you the history of Julia's death. She pronounced it; but even while she protested that she would never marry you, she declared to me, with the accents of intense passion, that though she had refused, she adored you, and that she would rather die at your feet, than live by my side.

"After betraying her feelings in a moment of extraordinary agitation, she found herself almost involuntarily engaged to you: she wrote to me, and threw herself on my mercy. My feelings and my conduct, at that time, appear strange to myself. I was excluded from her uncle's house, and that intercourse with her, which was dearer to me than existence, was interrupted and thwarted in every way. By one effort, one great sacrifice, I regained her confidence, and re-established myself in that forfeited intimacy, at the same time that I bound her by fresh ties of fear and obligation. Perhaps I was also touched by her terrible situation; but be that as it may, I *allowed* her to marry you; and by some concessions on my own part to her inveterate enemy, that old woman, — whose vindictive malice has ruined and undone us all, — I bought her silence, and once more shielded Ellen from disgrace and exposure.

"I need not go into further details. You now can trace for yourself the whole course of my relentless persecution, and of her long and bitter struggles. Form first to last, — from the hour she pledged her faith to you at the altar, to that in which you surprised her at my feet, — she has been true to you. I say it even now, with *jealous rage; for the fierce love with which I have loved her is still smouldering in my breast*, and will only die when I die; I

say it with the agony of death in my soul, — with the vision of an approaching eternity before me, — she has been true to you: she has loved you as I loved her; and when she clung to my feet, and vainly sued for mercy at my hands, it was to implore that I would suffer her to reveal the truth to you, the acknowledgment of which might then have saved her. She is dying now, and I have not long to live. She has never loved me, and I have loved her, — and I am sometimes mad — not *now*. If you do not believe me, send for the woman who saw her strike the child. Speak to Robert Harding. Curse *me*, and forgive *her*. Alice has forgiven me. Shall you forgive Ellen, and go to her?

"I have nothing more to say, and I sit writing to you as if the end of all things was at hand. "HENRY LOVELL."

With a deep-drawn sigh, and a steady gaze on the calm pure sky before him, Mr. Lacy folded and put up this letter. During the rest of his short journey he meditated in silence, on the sorrows he had left behind him, and those he was going in search of; and as he fixed his eyes on the blue and boundless arch over his head, his lips unconsciously repeated that sublime passage in the prophecies of Isaiah: — "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord; for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts."

On his arrival at the lodge of the park at Hillscombe, his inquiries after Mr. Middleton were answered by a positive assurance that he was not at home; and it was only after stating that the business he was come upon was of the highest importance, that he could induce the porter to dispatch a note from himself to Mr. Middleton, requesting an immediate interview, and reminding him of some circumstances connected with his late uncle, which gave him an especial claim upon his regard and respect. After a while, the servant returned, and requested Mr. Lacy to proceed to the house. As he drove through those grounds, — as he entered that house, the scene of poor Ellen's brief dream of happiness — *as he prepared* to meet her husband, he felt nearly overcome by *his anxiety for* the result of this important interview.

He was shown into the library, and at the end of a few minutes Edward Middleton came in, and, requesting him to be seated, alluded briefly to the circumstances which Mr. Lacy had mentioned, and begged to be informed as to the object of his visit. As Mr. Lacy looked on the pale stern countenance before him, and in its inflexible expression, and deeply-marked lines, read all he feared, he murmured to himself, "Unrelenting;" and his heart sunk within him.

"I am come here, Mr. Middleton, to perform a great duty, and to clear up a great mystery. As a minister of God, I claim from you a patient hearing, and that you will read a letter which I bring to you from one death-bed, and hearken to a dying appeal from another."

"Sir, I respect your character, and I revere your office; but if what you have to say relates to me, and not to yourself, let us break off this conversation at once. There are subjects, there are names which I never suffer any human being to allude to before me; and the sacred character which you bear, gives you no right to force them upon me."

"It has given me the right to receive from your dying wife a confession—"

Mr. Lacy stopped and hesitated; a convulsive emotion had passed over Edward's face, and he turned frightfully pale; but in an instant his features resumed their iron rigidity, and he waved his hand impatiently. "And it gives me the right," continued Mr. Lacy, "to tell you that you are committing a fearful injustice; that you are under a fatal delusion."

"She will die, then, as she has lived!" exclaimed Edward with violence. "She has lied, then, to God, as well as to me."

"Beware! beware," returned Mr. Lacy, "how you speak of one whom God has absolved,—whom He will receive; for He shows great mercy where man has none."

"There are crimes," rejoined Edward, fiercely,—"there are crimes which God may forgive but which man cannot."

He glanced at the letter which Mr. Lacy held; and, as he recognised the *handwriting*, the blood rushed violently to his face, *and then forsaking it, left it as* pale as ashes.

"Is *he* dead?" he asked, faintly, as he pointed to it.

"Life and reason are both forsaking him; but by a last effort, he gathered strength to write what you *must* read. You must read it; for a voice from the grave calls upon you to do so. You must read it; for your wife is dying, and she must be justified in your eyes; she must be forgiven by you, before her spirit returns to Him who gave it. Listen to me, listen to me, Mr. Middleton: as you fear God, and hope for Heaven, it is not the cause of a faithless wife I plead; it is that of a deeply-injured and much-belied woman; she has sinned, indeed, but not against you. God has, through my mouth, absolved her,—at His altar He has received her; and shall you, whom she has loved too much—too fondly—too tremblingly,—with a worship due to Him alone; shall you refuse her that hearing which, with dying accents, she craves,—that justice which, in her name, I demand from you?"

"God forgive me!" cried Edward, wildly; "God forgive me! for I cannot forgive her. She has made her peace with Heaven, you say. So be it, then,—let her die in peace. She has told you that she loved me? Did she tell you how I loved, how I worshipped her?—What is the punishment for those who betray, if those who are betrayed suffer as I have done! She has told you she is innocent; she has told you she is belied: has she told you that I found her prostrate at the feet of that man, who you say is now mad and dying?—that man, who it has almost maddened me not to kill,—whom it has almost killed me to spare—Go, go, Mr. Lacy!—pray for her,—pray with her; but do not ask *me* to forgive her."

"Have you not heard me, Mr. Middleton? Have you not understood me? I repeat to you, solemnly and earnestly, with all the conviction that a minute acquaintance with the sad history of her life can give, that your wife is not guilty of the crime which you impute to her; and that she has only loved you too passionately; only feared you too much. The pride, the sternness of your character, acted fatally upon a nature like hers. Beware, that, even now, God does not look down upon you both, and judge *you* the betrayer, and *her* the betrayed. *One* hour's indulgence, *one moment's* confidence, might have brought her to your feet, to

confess, not a crime, but a fact, 'which has been a covering to her eyes all the days of her life;' an accident which, in a fatal hour of weakness, she concealed; an accident which threw her into the power of those who, in hatred, or under the impulse of a guilty passion, sought to blight her peace, and ruin her virtue. That love which you doubt, in the place of a higher principle, saved her from guilt, and only left her a prey to the most protracted agony. Read this letter — it is from the man who vainly sought to gain her love, by wringing her heart — read this journal — read this confession of many sins, of many fears, of much sorrow; but own, as you read it, that her love to you was wonderful, and passing the common love of woman; and then come to forgive, and be forgiven, ere God takes to himself the being whom you once swore at the altar to keep, to comfort, and to cherish, until death parted you."

Edward Middleton made no answer to this solemn address. He appeared stunned and bewildered. He stretched out his hand in silence for the papers which Mr. Lacy held; — he wrung his hand, and took leave of him. He watched his carriage out of sight, and then locked the door, and remained alone for many hours.

A fearful communing with himself took place that night. He was a calm and a stern man; but bursts of passion shook his frame, and terrible words sprung from his lips, in the solitude of that night's watch; and tears, those dreadful tears which nothing but agony wrings from manhood's eye, fell on the pages before him. Who can tell what he suffered? — who can tell how he struggled? what curses rose to his lips? — what mental prayers recalled them? — what fierce anger burned within him? — what returning tenderness overcame him?

At seven o'clock the following morning, an express from Elmsley brought the intelligence of Henry Lovell's death. An hour afterwards Edward Middleton was on his way to the cathedral town of —.

It was on a mild day, as the sun was shining brightly on the leafless groves of Hillscombe, its slanting rays gilding the lawn on *which the house stood*, that a carriage drove slowly up the avenue.

When it stopped at the door, and the step was let down, Edward Middleton sprang out, lifted his wife in his arms, and carried her into the library.

Once before, a few months ago, he had led her into that room his bride — his idol — his flower of beauty — the pride of his soul. Now, he had brought her back to it to die — for there was death in that marble forehead; death in those painfully bright eyes; death in those transparent hands which held his; in that hollow voice, which murmured, as he laid that weak frame and weary head on the pillowed couch — "Home, home once more!"

He had sought her — he had found her dying — he had taken her in his arms — he had pressed upon her fevered lips such kisses as their hours of hope and of joy had never known — he had hoped against hope. When she had clasped her thin weak arms round his neck, and whispered, "Take me home, Edward, to die;" he had answered in the words of Scripture, "Thou shalt not die, but live!"

And, verily, in her deep love's excess, she found a short renewal of life. She gathered strength to rise from her bed of weakness and of pain, and, with her head on his bosom, and her hand in his, to breathe again the free air of Heaven, and gaze with a languid eye on those beauties of earth and sky, which have such a deep meaning, such a strange effect, on those who are about to die.

For she must die! — she feels it — she knows it — but not as once she thought to die; unreconciled to God, unforgiven by man. Her weary pilgrimage is drawing to a close; but the light of Heaven dawns upon it now.

She has a great duty to perform, and perform it she will; for she has learnt that the cross which saves us in eternity must be taken up on earth; and that without sacrifice there is no peace for the soul.

She has called Edward to her side; she has mentally prayed that strength may be given her for the trial at hand; she has said to herself, "The scene, his tears, his passion, his soul will too deeply move;" and she has charged him, with solemn earnestness, to leave her for some hours to herself, and then to return *and bless the* remaining days of that life he cannot save.

She remained alone; and deep and intense were the prayers she poured forth, as she waited for those she had sent for; those whom she had summoned around her in that solemn hour.

She had never looked so beautiful in her days of pride and health, as now, on her bed of sickness and sorrow, of penitence and peace. Yea, of peace; for, although the approaching hour was one of pain and trial; ay, and of shame too, yet her way was clear before her, and she turned not now her head aside from the cup of sorrow and of humiliation, but steadily prepared to drink it to the dregs.

When she saw Mrs. Middleton, the mother of her childhood, the friend of her youth; the friend who had lately sought her with a message of peace, when she had forsaken, and been forsaken by all the world, when she remembered what she had to tell her, her soul well-nigh fainted within her; but she held out her hand in silence, and prayed more earnestly.

When Alice, the widowed, the childless Alice, entered the room; when their eyes met, she opened her arms. Oh, what depths of mysterious feeling, of unutterable memories, of silent aspirations, were crowded in that embrace. O language, where is your strength? O words, your power, compared with the mute communion of such an hour?

But all are not assembled yet; and Ellen's eyes are fixed on the door with earnest expectation; and when it opened, and she saw Mr. Lacy, her guide, her friend; he who by his sacred ministry had prepared her for death, she turned paler than before, for he was not alone — an aged woman followed him, and gazed upon her with a strange and bewildered expression. There was a moment's deep silence, and then Ellen, turning successively to each of them, addressed them thus: —

"You who have been to me all tenderness — you who have been to me just and merciful, with a justice and a mercy more than human; you whom God made His instrument to bring me through much sorrow unto repentance; and you through whose means He brought me back to Himself, listen to me, and hearken to my dying words. Mrs. Middleton, you had a child, and you lost her; my hand, unwittingly, unknowingly (so help me God!

as I speak the truth) — *my* hand was the instrument of her death; it was lifted up in anger but not in malice, and that anger has been visited upon me by a fearful punishment, which, like the mark which was set on Cain's brow, has followed me all my days since, and has brought me to an early grave. Can you forgive me? Oh yes, by that hand which I grasp — by these tears which fall on my brow, and which wash away that fiery mark which has branded *it so long*, you do forgive me — you say of me what our Saviour said of his murderers, 'God forgive her, she knew not what she did.' And now," she continued after a pause, during which there was no sound in that room but stifled sobs, "and now let me take a solemn leave of you all; let me ask for your prayers, for my end is at hand."

Mrs. Tracy knelt by Ellen's bed-side, and said, in hardly articulate tones, "Pray for us when you are in Heaven."

"God bless you," answered Ellen, faintly, and closed her eyes. After an instant she opened them again, and turning to Mr. Lacy, she said, in a voice of the deepest emotion, "Oh, Mr. Lacy, is it not merciful that death has been so sent to me as to allow me time to rise up on my knees, and to cry, 'Lord have mercy upon me?'" She was seized with a sudden faintness, and sunk back on the bed exhausted.

All withdrew in silence except Mrs. Middleton, who, with clasped hands and streaming eyes, kept watch by the pale sufferer as she slept. She hardly realised to herself the truth of what Ellen had said; she could form but one idea, feel but one conviction — this cherished, this idolised being, was to die. Death had done its work with all she loved; she had before borne up against grief; now, for the first time, she resigned herself; out of the deep she called upon God, and in the horror, in the pity, in the unconquerable tenderness which vaguely filled her bewildered soul, she learnt "to cease from man and turn to God." She dared not *think*, and so she only prayed.

When Edward returned that day, he found his wife weaker than ever, but calmer still than she had yet been. She received him with a smile which pierced through his soul. The fearful *truth broke* slowly upon him that he *must* lose her; that the days

of trembling hope and fear, which he had gone through, since he had taken her back to his heart, must give way to that desolating certainty — to that inevitable anguish against which the feelings rebel while the understanding acquiesces. There was no secret between them now; they knew they must part; and her remaining days were spent in a long and deep farewell. She was more resigned than he was — she was nearer Heaven; she had suffered and struggled, and through much tribulation had reached the haven at last; life's last wave had carried her to the shores of eternity, and death for her bruised heart had a balm, for her weary spirit a rest, which life could never yield. She gazed upon him hour after hour, and her very soul seemed to speak out of her dying eyes;

> "And it seemed as the harps of the skies had rung,
> And the airs of Heaven played round her tongue,"

as she spoke of that death which had lost its sting — of that grave which had lost its victory; for in the might of her earthly love — in the ardour of her living faith, she discerned the shortness of time, the fulness of eternity; life seemed to her now but a little span, and she could say in the spirit of David, "I may not stay with thee, but thou wilt come to me."

Edward, the strong, the stern, the self-relying Edward, suffered more. His faith was as firm, but his hopes were less vivid; a vague remorse agitated him; Mr. Lacy's words to him on the day of their first interview had sown a seed of self-reproach in his heart which had wrought painfully since. Had not her face been so divinely serene, and her spirit so full of hope and of peace that it tempered the agony of his, he would have been still more miserable. Life, which to her appeared short, seemed to him so long; the path he was to tread so lonely; the hope he was to cherish so distant; the world as it is, so dreary; the world to come, so mysterious. One day that she seemed a little better, a shade stronger, than usual, he passionately kissed her pale cheek, and whispered, "You will not leave me, Ellen — you will not die?"

"I *cannot* live," she answered; "Edward, dearest, I ought not to live, I have suffered too much, too acutely, to raise my

head again, and meet what all must meet with in this world of sin and of sorrow. Believe me, Edward, my lot has been wisely ordered. I bless God, who in his boundless mercy has gently laid me down to die here at your side, your hand in mine, your words of love in my ears; they will follow me to the last, and 'When my failing lips grow dumb — when thought and memory flee,' the consciousness that you are near me will remain, and I shall die as I have lived — no, no, not as I have lived — my life has been dreadful, and my death is not."

She hid her eyes with her thin transparent hands, and a slight contraction for an instant wrinkled her brow. The vision of past sufferings had risen up before her; she remembered what she had gone through and trembled. But as she turned towards Edward the expression of mute anguish in his face affected her suddenly and deeply. She threw her arms around his neck, and cried, "I would stay if I could, Edward, but it is too late; the spring is broken, the light is quenched: we must part for a while."

"O God! O God!" murmured Edward, as he clasped his hands in an agony of grief and supplication. "Thou didst give her to me, and I cast her away from me. I was blind and had no mercy; now I see, and my misery is complete. Thy ways are just, but Thy judgments are dreadful!"

"But in the midst of them, my own, He remembers mercy. He has tried us, He has proved us, He has marked out for each of us our way to Heaven. Mine is short, for He saw my weakness. Yours may be long and arduous, for He knows you strong; but both will meet in the end. With one Lord, one Faith, one Hope, I die. With the same Lord, with the same Faith, with the same Hope, you will live. There is a blessed communion, in which we both believe, between those who rest in Heaven, and those who struggle on earth. You will pray for me when I am gone; I will pray for you where I go. At the altar, think of me, as if kneeling mysteriously at your side. Give me a secret chamber in your soul, where my spirit may meet yours, when you retire from the world to commune with God and be still; and when death comes at last to you, as it is now coming to me, think of this hour, *think of one so sinful* and so weak, passing with a strength not her

own, through its dark portal in peace, and God be with you then, my beloved, as He is now with me."

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Her prayer was heard in the hour of trial; when he lost all earthly hope, and felt himself of all men the most miserable, God was with him. When, two days later, she murmured in his ear, as he was supporting her head against his breast,

"Read the prayers for the dying," he read with a swelling heart and an unsteady voice, and at the end of each she faintly said, *Amen*. When he came to the last, no *Amen* was uttered on earth; the light was gone; the soul was fled; he was alone; and if God had *not* been with him then, he would indeed have been desolate and utterly forsaken, for he had few connections, few friends; he never opened his heart to any one, and in his grief he hid himself from the eyes of men, and communed with his own soul. God was with him during the first hours of agonising grief; during long days of gloom and silent loneliness; during years of calm sorrow and quiet exertion, in which he did much good, and learnt that lesson which affliction teaches, "In all things to be more resigned than blest;" and when he dies He will be with him still, for He never forsakes in death those who have served Him in life. He travelled for a few years, and then returned to Hillscombe, where he lived much alone. Once, five years after Ellen's death, while he was calling on Mrs. Moore, at Hampstead, he accidentally met Mr. Escourt, who slightly bowed to him and left the room. Edward turned deadly pale; and that night he had to struggle long and deeply with himself, before he could utter the most solemn sentence in the Lord's Prayer. With Mr. Lacy he formed a strict intimacy, which lasted as long as the life of that venerable man.

Mrs. Middleton never returned to Elmsley; and spent her remaining days in one of those beautiful and quiet spots on the coast of Devonshire. The sight and sound of the sea soothed and quieted the restless nervousness from which she suffered. She would sit for hours on the shore and watch attentively the advancing and re-

ceding of the tide, or the fishermen's children playing on the sand at her feet.

"How much that woman must have suffered," was the remark often made by strangers as they passed by her, and observed the expression of her face.

Once a little scene occurred which excited some attention in the by-standers. A pretty little girl, whom Mrs. Middleton had often noticed and caressed, was playing near her with another child. They quarrelled, and in her anger the little girl struck her playmate, who fell on the ground.

A loud and wild cry burst from Mrs. Middleton's lips; she laid hold of the child, and in a hoarse and trembling voice exclaimed, "You know not what you do! you know not what you do!"

Abashed and terrified, the child looked at her and began to cry. She never forgot that scene, nor the words of the pale lady in black, who so loved the sea and its loud roar, and who had started so violently and shrieked so wildly, when she had struck her playfellow.

Of Alice! What shall I say of Alice? What did she once say of her favourite flower, her type and her emblem, for it bore in its bosom the Cross and the Crown of Thorns, and it was pure and spotless as those that

"Won Eve's matron smile in the world's opening glow."

She said it had done what God had sent it into the world to do. It had given her buds in the spring, and flowers in the summer; thoughts of joy in health, thoughts of peace in sickness, thoughts of God and of Christ always. Alice has gone and done likewise. She goes about doing good. She weeps with those who weep, she rejoices with those who rejoice, she feeds the hungry, she clothes the naked, she visits the sick and those in prison, she teaches the ignorant, she prays for the guilty. Into the haunts of misery, into the abodes of despair, she goes; and speaks of peace where peace has never been, and of hope to those in whose ears the words sound strangely. "When the ear hears her it blesses her; when the eye sees her it gives witness to her; and the blessings of those

who are ready to perish come upon her. She is eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, a mother to the fatherless, and to those who have none to help them."

Morning and evening she kneels in church, and, like Anna, serves the Lord with fastings and with prayers. There she takes up the cross in the morning, bears it through the day, and returns at night to give thanks, and press it to her bosom with all its thorns and all its sharpness.

Is she happy? I have studied her face; I have watched her life; I have seen her pray by a death-bed; I have heard her sing to herself as she sat at work in her room; I have seen her play with joyous children; I have seen her weave garlands of bright flowers, but then I saw her lay them on a grave — and I dare not say she is happy; but I know she is of those who, if they mourn, shall be comforted; who, if they sow in tears, shall reap in joy; and I remember that a sword pierced through the soul of her whom all generations call blessed.

There is a man who goes every day to the same church, who sometimes supports an aged woman, and leads her gently to the bench where Alice sits; who kneels himself at a distance, and listens to the sound of her voice, as she utters the responses. This is Robert Harding; he visits the poor she visits; he hears the blessings they pour upon her; he talks of her to Mrs. Tracy; and he hopes that the time will come, when he may conceal his love so well, that she will speak to him familiarly again, as in the days of their childhood.

As time went by, its soothing effect told upon these mourners; those sorrows which had at first driven them to solitude as a refuge, when their acuteness was past, drew them together again. That mute sympathy which the heart can scarcely value during the first bitterness of its grief, became to each of them a source of consolation. Mrs. Middleton was to Edward and to Alice an object of tender solicitude. How often *he* felt that when they spoke together of things indifferent, or listened to music, or looked upon the beauties of nature, the same thought was in their minds, the same image before their eyes. On these occasions she sometimes

pressed his hand in silence, and both felt, without saying it, that their treasure was in Heaven.

In Mrs. Middleton's features, in the tone of her voice, in the expression of her face, Alice found a resemblance to the husband of her youth, which gave her an interest in her eyes which no other human being could have had; and in the tender and earnest affection which united them, both found their highest earthly comfort. They had learnt — one, after striving for it long and vainly, — the other, on the threshold of life, — that happiness is not the portion of earth; but they looked beyond it; and found, in the meantime, that each returning day, even to the deepest mourner, brings new blessings in the shape

"Of perils past, of sins forgiven,
Of thoughts of God, and hopes of Heaven."

THE END.

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MEMOIRS

OF

A FEMME DE CHAMBRE.

BY

THE COUNTESS OF BLESSINGTON.

SANCTIONED BY THE AUTHOR FOR CONTINENTAL CIRCULATION.

LEIPZIG

BERNH. TAUCHNITZ JUN.

1846.

MEMOIRS

OF

A FEMME DE CHAMBRE.

CHAPTER I.

We live in an age when to write memoirs is almost as common, if not quite as easy, as to read them. It is the knowledge of this fact that gives me courage to attempt the task I have imposed on myself, and should I fail in executing it, I shall have at least achieved my principal object, that of noting down events from which some moral may be drawn, some warning taken. The sentiments and opinions of a person who has filled only a position generally deemed so subaltern a one, as that of a *Femme de Chambre*, may be considered beneath the notice of grave and highly polished readers; but she who has been brought in close contact and daily association with individuals of her own sex, allowed to possess cultivated minds, and placed in the highest class, must be indeed peculiarly dull and unobservant if she has not profited by such advantages, and has not become able to draw inferences, and to form comments on what she has witnessed. Who will deny that the Memoirs of Madame de Motteville furnish some entertaining and instructive anecdotes and information relative to her royal mistress, Anne of Austria, the suspected wife of Louis XIII.? and without the Memoirs of Madame de Staël, formerly Mademoiselle de Launay, of how many amusing facts connected with her haughty mistress, the Duchess de Maine, should we have remained ignorant? I do not presume to institute any comparison between Mesdames de Motteville, de Staël, and my humble self; far be such vanity from me. I only name them

to illustrate a hypothesis which I would fain advance, namely, that no one, not even a parent, a husband, or the most intimate friend, can have the same opportunities of studying the character, disposition, temper, and peculiarities of a lady, as has her *Femme de Chambre*, who sees not only her *person*, but also her *mind en deshabillé*. Well and truly has it been observed by a clever writer, that no man is a hero to his *Valet de Chambre*. As well, and as truly may it be asserted, that no woman is a heroine to her personal attendant. How interesting then must be the study in the dressing rooms of persons who are seen by the world only in full costume with their manners as scrupulously got up for the occasion as is their dress, both calculated to produce the most advantageous effect in society, and laid aside when in the privacy of the *chambre de toilette*, that sanctuary, where no concealments can exist. Having, as I hope, established my hypothesis that *Femmes de Chambre* can best know their mistresses, and proved, if I may be permitted to parody two lines of Pope, that

> "They best can paint them,
> Who have dressed then most;"

I will commence by giving some account of myself, for it strikes me that a certain knowledge of an Author is always necessary in order that more confidence should be placed in his or her productions, and more allowance made for their defects.

I am the daughter of a man, who filled for some years the anomalous situation of private secretary, and *sur-intendant de maison*, to a nobleman of large expenditure and small means. I use the word anomalous, because my father possessed all the confidence of his employer, which could be accorded to the most trusted friend; yet, had to perform services which no friend could be charged with, and from which many menials would have recoiled. The well educated secretary, whose province it was to write and copy letters of great importance in more than two languages, his employer holding a high official appointment, had also the painful, and often humiliating task to perform, of soothing angry creditors, conciliating suspicious lenders of *money, and making* a small sum cover as large a surface of debt,

as gold-beaters do their thin leaf which they draw out to so wonderful an extent. He was an excellent Chancellor of the Exchequer of his needy master, and an adept in the difficult art of keeping up appearances when any one, with less tact, would have let the nakedness of the land be seen. Was a dinner to be given, a ball or concert to be got up, when the funds were so low that no sovereign could be found in Lord Willamere's purse, although his royal Sovereign smiled most graciously on him whenever opportunity offered, Stratford, so was my father named, was told to manage some way or other to *find* money for those who would no longer furnish things on credit, and to *talk over* those who were less obdurate, to add some more items to their already long bills. Musicians and singers, I have often heard him say, were the most unmanageable persons he had to deal with. *They* would insist on ready money, especially those amongst them who had established reputations, and high salaries at the Italian Opera; and these were precisely the persons whom Lord Willamere desired most should perform at his concerts.

Many has been the *Casta Diva*, who in spite of all the honied words addressed to her by *Mons. le Sécrétaire*, in order to coax her either to moderate her demands, or to give credit to his Lord for the payment of her extravagant ones, who has uttered refusals in a louder and harsher tone, than was ever ventured on in the most termagant *rôles* before the public, and who has insisted on being paid in advance with gold for her notes.

Many have been the rising singers, whose fame had not yet been stamped by fashion, and who consequently would have been content with a trifling remuneration, who sung at concert after concert at Lord Willamere's without receiving any, lured by the delusive hopes that their names figuring in the papers, as having appeared there, might lead to a command from royalty, or future *paid* engagements. My father dared not reveal to those poor *artistes* how little chance there was of his lord's advancing their interests; or how tenacious he was of never interfering in the patronage of those appointed to arrange concerts at "the Castle at Windsor," or at "the Palace;" yet it pained him to permit them to remain in error, and to see them incurring expense they could

but ill afford, in order to be well-dressed at Lord Willamere's concerts, whenever the *prima donnas* of the day inexorably refused to sing at them. Lenders of money were lured to grant loans, by hopes held out of good situations to be procured for their relations; and creditors were soothed by similar promises. My Lord Willamere, too, was a bachelor, exceedingly good-looking, and with very captivating manners, two advantages, which, joined to his high rank and fashion, led all those interested in his welfare to believe that he must inevitably marry some rich heiress, whose wealth would enable him to pay off all his debts. Hence, never did one of those poor victims, almost always sought for their gold, appear in the metropolis, that she was not selected by the creditors of Lord Willamere as his bride, and each of these delusive hopes was the cause of a prolongation of their patience, and of his lordship's bills.

The suavity of his manner, and easiness of his temper, had attached his secretary to Lord Willamere; and although he saw much to censure in the reckless extravagance of his employer, and his utter carelessness of the sufferings, or ruin of those who trusted him, he nevertheless had so fascinated my father, that he would have made any sacrifice rather than abandon him.

The secretary often accompanied his lord to Altonbury Castle, the seat of the marquis of that name, who had married Lord Willamere's only sister. He there saw my mother, who was a governess to Lady Altonbury's children, became captivated by her beauty and gentleness, and, after a courtship of some length, protracted by the consciousness of their mutual poverty, and state of dependence, and the dread of entailing increased difficulties on each other, they, hopeless of any amelioration in their circumstances, took the desperate step of marrying. My mother, like her husband, was an orphan with no near relations, so there was no one to consult on the step they were about — no one to warn them of its consequences. Lord Willamere, who felt he could not do without my father, made a merit of necessity, and told him, when the approaching event was announced to him, that if he was *determined* to marry a portionless bride, an act of folly, *however*, which he most gravely counselled him against, he would

grant his sanction to his bringing his wife to Willamere House. Mrs. Stratford might make herself useful in superintending the domestic arrangements, and checking the imposition of the housekeeper and housemaids; nay, as Lady Altonbury had informed him she wrote a fine hand, and was a proficient in French, German, and Italian, she might be made serviceable in copying out the foreign correspondence. My father's poverty left him no alternative, and my mother entered on a life of painful dependence, with all the humiliation, but not the salary, of a servant.

My father's was indeed a laborious and unhappy life. The only son of a poor curate, who half-starved himself to send him to college, and who only lived long enough to see him become a good scholar, the poor young man found himself wholly dependent on those in the college who could speak personally of his character and acquirements. Through the recommendation of one of these, a man of considerable influence, he entered the house of Lord Willamere, fully convinced that one who held so high an official appointment could not fail to have an opportunity of remunerating his services: and faithfully and conscientiously he determined they should be fulfilled, trusting that he might eventually look forward to some situation offering a modest competency. Too inexperienced to name a salary for his services, he went on from year to year, receiving now and then, sums of ten pounds, as instalments of the allowance, the precise amount of which had never been specified; the receipt of which small payments, however, he had always carefully noted, calculating on deducting them from the gross amount he was to have whenever a day of reckoning came. This so much wished-for day, however, never arrived. Lord Willamere never had a moment's time to look into his own personal or household expenditure, much less to come to a settlement with his secretary; and the delicacy of sentiment of the said secretary, added to his perfect knowledge of the many claims on his lord, and the very small means for meeting even a quarter of them, prevented his urging his own interests, or even reminding his employer of the pecuniary embarrassments in which he continually found *himself*. If Lord Willamere ever bestowed a

thought on the position of his secretary, — and it is doubtful if he ever found time for it, so occupied was he in finding expedients to meet the difficulties of his own, — he probably consoled himself by thinking that "Stratford could rub on some way or another. *His* tradesmen would certainly give credit to *his* secretary, the person through whom all *his* payments were made. Yes, Stratford was sure to get on; and then, persons like him could live for so little, that *they* could not be exposed to the annoyances that attend men of high rank with fortunes inadequate to meet the demants entailed by their station."

Those with large establishments are more disposed to underrate, than overrate, the pecuniary wants of persons in subordinate situations. They seldom reflect that regularity in payments, so essential to the well-being of all classes, becomes doubly necessary to those with limited means; and that no degree of economy, however scrupulously exercised, can ward off the ruinous results of an ill-paid income.

Obliged to be almost constantly in Willamere House, to be ready to attend his lord's summons, it was deemed expedient that my father should reside altogether there. His repasts, and he took care that they should be as frugal as possible, were furnished in the mansion by a *fille de cuisine*, whose skill in the culinary department he rarely taxed more than in the cooking of a couple of mutton chops or a beef steak with some potatoes; and his solitary meals were any thing but luxurious or cheerful. They who bask in the sunshine of fortune, with enjoyments courting them on every side, can form but a faint notion of the intensity with which the poor and lonely cherish affection, that first cordial drop in the bitter cup of life, which has cheered, and made them forget its former unpalatableness. To be no longer a solitary being on earth, unloved, uncared for, wearing away existence in the monotonous routine of uninteresting duties, is almost to be happy; but to be warmly, fondly loved, and by a creature, too, gifted with no common mind, as well as no ordinary share of beauty and accomplishment, was indeed bliss. No wonder, then, that my father forgot his dependent state, his contracted means, prudence —*every thing* — but that he loved, and was beloved; and with-

out a home, however humble, which he could call his own, wedded; and, by Lord Willamere's permission, brought his bride to Willamere House.

His lordship had never been so much struck with her beauty, as when on his return home a few days after his secretary's marriage, he presented himself in the small sitting room assigned for her use, to offer his congratulations, and express his hope that she would make herself at home and comfortable. There are many men who never think of sin till an opportunity of committing it with facility, if not with impunity, seems to be afforded to them. "Egad," thought Lord Willamere, as he left the meanly furnished and small room inhabited by my mother, "I never remarked how very handsome Stratford's wife is before. I know no woman in the society in which I live, who is half so beautiful. The fellow has devilish good taste, I must acknowledge. My libertine friends will congratulate me on having so fair an inmate, and all my denials will never convince them that *I* had nothing to say to arranging this marriage, or that I do not feel a more than common interest in Mrs. Stratford. — And, by Jove, it will be very difficult *not* to feel a more than ordinary interest in her. Having so pretty a woman thrown in one's way, as it were, brought into my very house, and without any contrivance whatever of mine; yes, the temptation might prove too strong for a wiser man than I am, where a beautiful woman is in question, and I fear will be too great for me. Well, Stratford must blame himself if any thing should happen. It will be his own fault for bringing her into my house. However innocent our acquaintance may be, the good-natured world will be sure to think the reverse, and Mrs. Stratford's reputation will suffer as much, as if she were blameable; and, *après tout*, when a woman's reputation *is* injured, I don't see why *I* need be so scrupulous of seeking the good fortune for which I shall be sure to have the credit! I am tired of the Duchess. She really is so *overloving*, so *exigeante*, that a jealous wife of my own could not be more *ennuyeuse* than this wife of my friend. Yet, hang me if I would not rather injure any man of my acquaintance than poor Stratford. He is so gentleman-like in his feelings, so refined in his habits, and so delicate about asking for

money. I almost wish he had not thrown this temptation in my way.

"What fools married men are! They always lay the foundation of their wives' fall. Look at every trial occasioned by conjugal infidelity, and one will find that it was the husband who established between some one of his dissolute friends, and his wife, the most dangerous of all habits, that of allowing him to become *l'ami de la maison*, whose daily visits and constant attendance have often brought the lady's name into disrepute before aught more than appearances could be urged against her. The poor woman finds herself the town talk before she dreamt of evil. The foolish husband, convinced of the innocence of his wife, and the sincerity of his friend, vows that *he* will not be bullied by the world into breaking off an intimacy that has has become necessary to his comfort. The wife's mind, by slow, perhaps, but by sure degrees, gets accustomed to the notion of having her name coupled with Lord A, or Mr. B. Lord A or Mr. B begins to think it a folly to let the world talk without cause, and *opportunity*, that bane to virtue, leads from imaginary to real guilt.

"O ye unhappy husbands! knew ye your danger as we bachelors and *hommes de bonnes fortunes* do, how would ye eschew permitting such dangerous intimacies beneath your roofs! How would ye shun the insidious friend, who begins by making himself agreeable to both husband and wife, by breaking the monotony of their conjugal *tête-à-têtes*, and ends by destroying every vestige of affection between them.

"But here I am moralizing on the fate of husbands in general, even while meditating an injury on one in particular. Strange folly, is it not, that men who as bachelors have had personal experience of the consequences which too frequently result from the weakness of husbands in exposing their wives to temptation, should fall precisely into the same error when they become Benedicts? This does seem strange and unaccountable! but the cause may be traced to the want of reason men betray in the selection of their wives. They marry only for beauty, or for fortune. The beauty is loved and treated, for a short time, as a mistress, *then slighted* as a wife. Her society becomes irksome, her con-

sciousness of the change in her husband's feelings, — and few have the delicacy or kindness to conceal such changes, — wounds and offends her; reproaches, sullenness, or low spirits ensue. His home is no longer agreeable, and he is glad to call in the aid of some pleasant friend, to render it less intolerable. One folly leads to another, until the husband rushes into a court of law, to have an evaluation made by twelve honest men, of the loss he has sustained in his wife's affection and society, both of which he was, in all probability, heartily tired of; or, if more patient and enduring, he submits to his fate without seeking redress from the law, he must be content with being pointed at, poor easy man, as a fool, who is imposed on, or as a wretch who connives at the guilt of his wife, and his own dishonour.

"It is this knowledge of life, that is, life in the world in which I live, that has caused me to be a Bachelor at — Hang it, I hate to mention the precise age at which I have arrived. I certainly don't look so old," and Lord Willamere glanced complacently at himself in the glass. "I wish my hair did not get so thin about the temples. I have tried every balm, oil, and pomatum ever advertised in the newspapers, but I find no advantage from them. What a strange fancy the old tyrant Time has for hair! I suppose he mistakes it for hay, and so mows it with the scythe, with which he is always represented."

Such were the cogitations of Lord Willamere on the day he paid his secretary's wife his first visit. If any of our readers should question how we became acquainted with the said cogitations, questions which we warn them are always considered by Authors as unpolite as if in society some one inquired how certain facts just stated, and supposed to be known only by individuals equally interested in not revealing them, came to be known — we inform them once for all, that historians, biographers, and novelists, are endowed with a peculiar faculty, denied to others — that of knowing what passes in the minds of the characters they portray. How else should grave historians be able to give us not only the words of kings, heroes, and statesmen, uttered in the privacy of their chambers, to ministers, generals, and secretaries, who have never been even suspected of betraying their confidence, but

even the thoughts known only to themselves? Having now, as we hope, established our right to the privilege we claim of making our readers acquainted with the secret thoughts and reflections of the characters we attempt to delineate, we trust we may henceforth continue to unroof the heads of our personages, and display what passes in them, as Asmodeus did the roofs of houses, without being further questioned as to our means of acquiring information, and that our readers will take for granted all we write. In this confidence we leave them at the close of this, our first chapter, meaning in the second to let them see the result of Lord Willamere's cogitations.

CHAPTER II.

Had Lord Willamere followed the dictates of his inclinations, his first visit to the wife of his secretary would have been quickly followed up by a second; but the prudence instigated by a consciousness of his own evil intentions, whispered the necessity of allowing some days to elapse before he presented himself again in her apartment. My father felt rather flattered than surprised when informed of the courtesy of his employer; and, good easy man! received it as a proof of the respect entertained for himself. But when, a few days after, Lord Willamere proposed that he and Mrs. Stratford should dine with him, and urged it so strongly that he knew not how to refuse, a doubt, for the first time, crossed his mind whether it would be correct to bring his wife to the table of Lord Willamere, without the presence of any other lady to sanction it.

"Surely," said the Earl, observing his hesitation to accept the invitation, "you, my dear Stratford, who have been for so many years domesticated, as it were, here, and who have so often dined *tête-à-tête* with me, cannot let any false notions of etiquette or ceremony prevent your wife from making a trio at my table? Were you, my good fellow, to ask me to make a third with you and *madame* at dinner, in your apartment, there could surely be no impropriety in my accepting it. Where, then, can be the *difference in you* and her dining with me in mine?"

Although this sophistry did not convince the secretary, it embarrassed him, and not knowing how to get out of the dilemma in which he found himself placed by it, he accepted the invitation.

"I wish you had declined it, my dear," said my mother, "for I don't think it either prudent or proper that I should dine at Lord Willamere's table without any other woman. You know I had a great objection to becoming an inmate in the house of a single man, and that only your prayers that our union should no longer be protracted, and the impossibility of our scanty means furnishing us a lodging elsewhere, induced me to consent to a measure which, could it be avoided, I would repudiate."

"Well then, dearest, all I will urge is, that as I foolishly accepted the invitation, do pray for this once accompany me. Lord Willamere seemed to have set his heart on it, and may be offended if you do not go. There will be no other guests, and henceforth we will decline dining with him."

"I would not have you decline; on the contrary, I wish you to live exactly on the same terms with his lordship as previously to our marriage, when you used to dine with him so often."

"What, and leave you to dine alone, Emily? No; that I could not bring myself to do."

And the fond husband pressed the delicate form of his wife to his heart, and she, unwilling to refuse any request of his, silenced the pleading of her own better judgment, and consented to dine with his lordship. The air of embarrassment and timidity with which she entered the library, betrayed to Lord Willamere that my mother was an unwilling guest there; and with all the tact peculiar to a well-bred man, and above all, one who had deeply studied woman, he instantly endeavoured to re-assure her, by the respectful manner in which he welcomed her. Had she been a person of the most exalted rank, he could not have evinced a more deferential tone towards her; and many were the ladies of his acquaintance, with high-sounding titles, who would have been surprised had they witnessed how much more respectful was his treatment of his poor secretary's wife, than of themselves. Lord Willamere was one of the most agreeable men of his day, and seldom did he wish to please, that his efforts were not crowned

with success. His conversation, at once brilliant and rational, possessed the power of drawing out those with whom he talked; and never did they leave his society without being pleased with him, and satisfied with themselves. Often had my mother, during his frequent visits to his sister, Lady Altonbury, been a delighted listener to the conversation of Lord Willamere, while she presided at the tea-table; but she was forced to admit that he appeared to less advantage there, than while doing the honours of his own; and the delicate tact with which he directed his attention equally to her husband as to herself, flattered while it pleased her. Nevertheless, she could neither vanquish nor dissemble the constraint, which a consciousness of her being in a false position imposed on her, and never had she appeared to less advantage than on that day, when, entrenched in a more than ordinary degree of reserve, she did little more than assent in monosyllables to the observations of her clever host.

The dessert had only been a few minutes placed on the table, when the abrupt entrance of two gentlemen increased the embarrassment of my mother. Nor did Lord Willamere seem pleased by their presence. Both stared with ill-disguised astonishment at the lady, and this circumstance rendered her still more sensible of the equivocalness of her position. Lord Willamere, with intuitive delicacy, marked her increased embarrassment, as well as the glances of unchecked admiration which his visitors directed towards her. Hoping, however, that they would soon withdraw, he did not at first present them to her; but when they stated that they had dined at the coffee-room at the House of Commons, where they had been detained by a debate, and had come to communicate some political news to him, he was compelled to ask them to sit down and have some wine. "Permit me, Mrs. Stratford, to present to you, Lord Henry Middlecourt and Mr. Addington," said Lord Willamere. The evident embarrassment and timidity of my mother, while it brought the roses to her cheek, and enhanced her beauty, only served to convince the libertine friends of her host, that the suspicions they had formed to her disadvantage were but too well founded. Each in turn addressed *some common-place* observation to her, but her reserved de-

meanour, and monosyllabic replies, discouraged their advances, although their injurious opinion of her remained unchanged. My mother sate on thorns, and when Lord Willamere asked her advice on some subject connected with furnishing houses," to which the conversation had turned, she, anxious to make known to the strangers her real position, referred to my father, saying, "My husband, my lord, is more conversant with such matters than I am." This speech she expected would at once remove the surmises to which her presence, *en famille* as it were, at Lord Willamere's table had given rise, — for, that injurious surmises had been formed, she with feminine quickness of apprehension had guessed — but she little knew the men who had formed them, for no sooner had they become acquainted with the fact, that the beautiful woman before them was the wife of their host's secretary, than their prurient imaginations created an attachment between the parties, little creditable to the virtue of the lady or the morals of Lord Willamere. They exchanged glances of intelligence confirmatory of their suspicions, while my poor mother's prophetic spirit quailed as it divined the gross insult which these suspicions offered to her. She longed to leave the room, yet dreaded doing so, lest such a step might betray the fact of her being an inmate at Lord Willamere's, and so render her case still worse in their eyes. For the first time she began to think her husband obtuse, when stealing sundry looks at him expressive of her dissatisfaction, she saw that he appeared wholly unconscious of any cause for such a feeling on her part, and was quietly eating some fruit. Not so careless was Lord Willamere. *He* evinced, by various ways, that he was sensible that she was ill at ease, and that he was pained at her being so. His manner towards her became, if possible, more respectful than before the entrance of his unwelcomed guests; and, when he saw that it failed to reassure her, he proposed ringing to command coffee to be served in the library.

"As this is the first time, Mrs. Stratford, that you have honoured me by your presence here," said he, "I must not permit you to be bored too long in the dining-room. When my sister, Lady

Altonbury, comes to town, I hope you will give her and me the pleasure of your company at dinner here often."

There was a considerateness and delicacy in this speech which gratified my mother, although the motive of it was so obvious to her, that she more than ever reproached herself for having been overruled into placing herself in a position that rendered it necessary. Never previously had she been so sensible of her husband's want of knowledge of the world, and more especially of the *usages du monde*, against which her presence at the table of Lord Willamere, without any other female to countenance it, was a violation, as then, because she had never before seen him placed in any position that called for the exercise of his *savoir vivre*. Bred in a college, and among students who like himself depended solely on their acquirements for future subsistence, he had little time, and no occasion, to become acquainted with the etiquette of society; and his natural good-breeding had hitherto prevented this want of knowledge of the conventional habits of life, from being noticed. Almost as great a recluse in the house of his patron, as he had been at college, his solitary habits were only broken into by an occasional *tête-à-tête* dinner with Lord Willamere, and an Easter or Christmas visit to his lordship's sister, when he accompanied him in order to be on the spot to carry on the voluminous correspondence that devolved on the man in office. No wonder, then, that he was ignorant of the rules of etiquette, invented to hold society together, and any breach of which is looked on by the supporters of this artificial code as a sin of deeper dye than one involving the most serious consequences. The very frankness and honesty of his nature, joined to the seclusion of his youth in a college, and since then in the house of Lord Willamere, rendered him more unfit than other men for the acquisition of this species of knowledge; and while perfectly capable of giving an epitome of the laws of nations, he might at any hour unconsciously commit a solecism on the puny ones of the artificial circle denominated the fashionable *world.* It was this ignorance that led him to urge his wife to fulfil *the dinner engagement* he had accepted for her with Lord Willamere, *and which* kept him from comprehending the glances of *painful embarrassment* which from time to time she cast towards

him, after the arrival of Lord Henry Middlecourt and Mr. Addington.

"Dear, good William, his is too fine a nature to suspect the evils that render a strict observance of the rules of etiquette so necessary in society," thought his fond wife. "It must, therefore, be my duty to guard against any infraction of them, and to avoid, henceforth, those embarrassing positions into which his ignorance of conventional usages might lead me."

"Were you ill, dearest Emily?" inquired my father, when he joined his wife in the library; leaving Lord Willamere to hear the political news which his visitors came to communicate.

"No, not ill, William; only ill at ease, because conscious that I committed a breach in the rules of propriety in dining at Lord Willamere's table. I was mortified that two of his lordship's friends should have become cognizant of the fact, and was covered with confusion at the bare idea of the evil interpretation they would but too probably put on it."

"Surely, Emily, you judge them too severely! What evil could be attributed when I, your husband, was present?"

"Alas, dear William, had you lived, as I have done, in families where *appearances* were as severely judged as crimes, you would not wonder that I felt embarrassed, nay more, positively alarmed, this evening."

Then it was that my mother revealed to her simple-minded husband some of those laws of etiquette of which he had previously been in utter ignorance, and made him a wiser, though not a happier man; for now, aware that his wife's objection to dining at Lord Willamere's table was founded on her sense of propriety, and not, as he had before imagined, from a dislike to society, he felt hurt that a man so well versed in a knowledge of the world as his lordship, should have proposed a step in violation of its usages; and he promised that henceforth he would never urge his Emily to act contrary to her own sense of what was correct.

"You are a devilish lucky dog, Willamere," said Lord Henry Middlecourt *to his host*, when the door closed after his lordship's *secretary.*

"*I am not aware* of any peculiar good luck just now," replied

Lord Willamere, endeavouring to look as unconscious as possible, although well divining to what good fortune his friend alluded.

"Come, come, don't be so very sly: you know perfectly well that I refer to the luck of your having a secretary with so very handsome a wife, and who is so sociable as to come and dine with you, *en famille*, whenever you wish it."

"You are quite wrong in your conjectures, I can assure you, Middlecourt. Mrs. Stratford never dined with me before, — is a particularly correct woman, and a great favourite with my sister, Lady Altonbury."

"All this we are bound to believe, my dear fellow, the moment you assert it, and more especially with such a grave face. Nevertheless I must still consider you a very lucky man to have so simple-minded a secretary with so handsome a wife; why, he seemed as innocent of his own false position as a child, while his handsome wife betrayed in a thousand ways her overwhelming consciousness of it."

"I really can see nothing false in his position. He has dined with me a hundred times before."

"Yes, when he was a bachelor I suppose; and if you can get him to see no harm in bringing his beautiful wife into your lordship's dangerous company, to enable her to contrast your powers of captivation, allowed by all women to be irresistible, with his simplicity and *manque de savoir vivre*, I must persevere in thinking you a lucky fellow."

"No more of this bantering, Middlecourt; it is out of place, I assure you." And Lord Willamere looked so displeased, that his friend saw it was time to drop the subject. But though he did so, his conviction that a *tendresse* towards the secretary's pretty wife existed on the part of Lord Willamere, remained firm as ever; nay, the very seriousness with which the latter denied it, convinced him still more of the truth of his suspicions.

When Lord Henry Middlecourt and Mr. Addington walked from Lord Willamere's to their club that night, they renewed the subject of Mrs. Stratford.

"She is either a dragon of prudery, which her presence at *Willamere's table* would seem to impugn, or else she is afraid

of making him jealous, for you saw how cold and reserved she was," said Lord Henry Middlecourt.

"But might we not put a more charitable interpretation on the poor woman's conduct?" observed Mr. Addington. "She may be correct, though not versed in the rules of strict propriety, as her dining with Willamere implies; and she may be in love with her husband, who is a very good-looking fellow — a possibility that never has entered your head, my friend."

Their arrival at their club prevented Mr. Addington offering any other hypothesis in justification of the secretary's wife; but none that he could suggest would have changed the opinion of his companion, who, accustomed to look on the evil side of all pictures, had made up his mind on this subject. Nor did he refrain from communicating it to others. Many were the young *roués* at the club that night to whom he gave an exaggerated account of the snug little party he had broken in upon at Willamere's, exciting in the minds of all a strong desire to see the beautiful Mrs. Stratford, a sentiment of envy at the *bonne fortune* of Willamere, and of contempt for the secretary, whom they set down either as a duped, or an infamous husband conniving at his own dishonour. Thus, while two beings, innocent of even a thought of guilt, and incapable of entertaining one, were quietly and calmly slumbering on their pillows, slander was busy with their names: the pure wife was mentioned as one who might be sought, if not won, by any of the libertines among whom the fame of her beauty was bandied about; and the finger of scorn was ready to be pointed at her honourable minded husband, by men who would have gloried in dishonouring him; and Lord Willamere was considered as a very lucky fellow, much to be envied for this *bonne fortune*. How far from the truth were the suspicions of these libertines! For while they declared Lord Willamere a lucky dog, and circulated among their coteries the report of his supposed *liaison* with his secretary's wife, that nobleman was devising plans for furnishing excuses for being admitted to her presence, yet so awed by her dignified reserve, that many of those schemes which suggested themselves to his prolific brain, were dismissed in his dread lest their being carried too promptly into execution might

alarm or offend her sensitive delicacy. Yet this very delicacy and reserve invested her with new charms. Never previously had he encountered a woman who inspired him with such a dread of incurring her displeasure. Was it possible that she had already divined the sentiments he felt towards her, so guarded too as he had been? To the unlucky and ill-timed visit of Lord Henry Middlecourt and Mr. Addington, he attributed her extraordinary reserve; and heartily did he wish both these gentlemen in a place not to be named to ears polite, for their *mal-à-propos* visit and its consequences. He felt certain that one, if not both men would give their own version of the dinner party they had broken in on, and that the reputation of Mrs. Stratford would be made the sport of their coteries. He lamented this probability, not from any respect for her character, but from a dread that such reports might not only, by some chance, reach her ears, and so put her still more on her guard, but that they might encourage other pretenders to her favour.

"Fools," thought Lord Willamere, "while they believe me blessed with her affection, I dare not even hint that I aspire to it, lest she should discard me from her presence for ever. What a lovely, what an exquisite creature she is! There is something about her that repels even the slightest approach to familiarity, and makes me feel when near her, that I shall never have courage to tell her I love her. I wish I could get her out of my head — out of my heart, I should have said — for hang me if she has not taken possession of that fortress, which, though often assailed, and with sundry breaches made in it, never before capitulated to a victorious enemy. To think of her lavishing the treasures of her affection on poor simple Stratford, while I would give worlds, if I possessed them, for even the privilege of merely seeing her every day and being permitted to converse with her. I could not have believed it possible that in so short a time I should have become so madly in love, and with so little prospect too of a return. To see her husband eating his dinner as phlegmatically as if she were not seated opposite to him, while her beautiful face, lovely in all its various expressions, rendered it a difficult task for me to keep my eyes from it even for a moment, or to eat a morsel, was

really wonderful. Happy man! *he* is so sure of her affection that he can eat in peace, while the bare idea of ever making her sensible of my passion sends the blood so rapidly to my heart that my pulse throbs and my hand trembles. I can think of nothing but her. The notion that she is beneath my roof, that only a few stairs and a corridor separate us, fires my blood. Vain thought—an impassable gulph divides us. She loves another, and is a virtuous, a chaste woman. Only such can inspire the passion I now feel. Could I hope to vanquish the virtue of the too charming Emily, I should love her less madly than I do; and libertine as I have been, and as I am, she would be less dazzlingly bright, less lovely, were she divested of that purity, which, like a veil, shades, but conceals not her beauty, giving a winning grace to it. Then the absence of all coquetry, all desire to please, how it enhances her attractions! If women did but know how much more they captivate us by not seeking to do so, and how irresistible a charm virtue lends them, how few would become our victims, and have to deplore their own credulity and our falsehood!"

Such were the reflections that filled the mind of the enamoured Lord Willamere, as he reclined on his sleepless couch, tortured by the pangs of a hopeless passion.

CHAPTER III.

Lord Willamere allowed four days to pass over after the dinner described in our former chapter, before he ventured again to present himself at the door of the little sitting-room occupied by the wife of his secretary. How often during those four days, which seemed to him of interminable length, had he been tempted to break through the restrictions his prudence had imposed on him, and to seek the presence of her who now occupied all his thoughts. But a dread of alarming her by his too frequent visits deterred him; and he imagined that a forbearance which cost him so many struggles merited the reward of a less cold reception than he had previously experienced. The four days which had appeared to creep so slowly, and to be of such interminable length to him,

had glided so rapidly by with Mrs. Stratford, that, when he sent to inquire if she were at home, his visit struck her as following so quickly on the heels of his former one, that a sense of its impropriety brought the blush of wounded delicacy to her cheek.

"Present my respects to his lordship, and say that I am so particularly engaged that I cannot receive visitors," said she to the servant.

The message had so powerful an effect on the nerves of Lord Willamere, that he positively grew red and then pale, as he reflected on it. How cold, how cutting! nay, how insolent was such treatment of *him*, — and in his own house too! And for the nonce Lord Willamere forgot that the very circumstance which added to his displeasure on this occasion, namely, his visit being refused *in his own house*, ought to have pleaded against his entertaining any project hostile to the honour or peace of those who so far confided in him as to become its inmates. He forgot the gross breach of hospitality, and of honour he meditated, and with a meanness unworthy of a gentleman, presumed that the very circumstance which ought to have rendered Mrs. Stratford sacred in his eyes, should have induced a more respectful deference to his proposed courtesy. Then it occurred to him that she might be unwell, or perhaps in an undress in which she did not wish to be seen. Yes, it must be so, and *he* had been wrong in blaming her for declining his visit. The wife of a poor secretary could not be expected to be always dressed in a style fit to receive visitors of distinction, like *les grandes dames* of his acquaintance, and allowance must be made for Mrs. Stratford. He longed to inquire after her health when he entered the bureau where her husband was writing, but an embarrassment unusual to him, which, whether proceeding from a consciousness of his own evil intentions, or a dread of awakening the suspicions of his secretary, checked the inquiry as it rose to his lips, and he felt, for the first time, ill at ease with Stratford.

When he rode out in the afternoon, and passed a certain *nursery in the* environs of London, no less remarkable for the *beauty of the bouquets* sold there than for the extravagance of the *prices demanded* for them, he omitted not to purchase one for the

lady of his thoughts, and as he threw down the guinea asked for it, he forgot that the said guinea was one of the last remaining in his purse from a loan effected some ten days before on the reasonable terms of fifty per cent; nay more, he remembered not that the poor secretary's wife for whom this superfluous luxury was intended, might, from his backwardness in paying the services of her husband, be in want of many of the comforts, if not necessaries of life. *He* thought only of marking his attention by a delicate gift that might remind the receiver of the donor, and as he had the fragrant *bouquet* enveloped in paper, and confided to the hands of his groom, he only wished that he might have the pleasure of presenting it in person to the lady for whom it was designed.

"I have now, my lord, some very rare and fine specimens of the flowers your lordship has so often asked for," said the nursery-man.

"I do not require any at present," was the reply; but a whole history of man's inconstancy was comprised in it.

"There 's really no knowing what to make of these great folk," observed the nursery-man to his wife, when having seen Lord Willamere gallop off, he entered the little parlour in which she was seated at her work. "Why it was only a month ago that my Lord Willamere used to come here continually asking for that new species of heart's-ease, and saying he would give any price for it, and now, when I have taken such pains to get it, and expected to be well paid for my trouble, he tells me he doesn't require it. I suppose as how the lady he wanted it for, has now some fresh fancy."

"It 's more likely, Thomas, that *his lordship* has some fresh fancy. Ah! you men, you men. I often think that one might guess the changes in these fine gentlemen's hearts, by the changes in their orders for flowers. One time they 're mad for some particular flower, and will be satisfied with no other, because, as every fool might know, the lady who is the favourite for the time, likes *that best. Then some* other flower is wanted, and only *that will do.*"

"*But, mayhap*, Mary, that it isn't the fault of the men, but

the women. Your sex are so changeable, that one day you like one flower, and the next another."

"No, Thomas, it 's no such thing, we always prefer the flower we liked best when we were in love. Don't I always prefer the moss-rose above all other flowers? and don't you remember how you used to bring me one every Sunday while they were in bloom, and I used to keep it in water, and sigh when it faded? Ah! how well I remember those days! But I am sure that there is always some new love in the case when these fine gentlemen ask for a new flower. Do you remember how many *bouquets* of forget-me-not, this same Lord Willamere used to send to that grand house in Grosvenor Square, during one season? Then the prices he used to pay, a few weeks ago, for heart's-ease to send to Belgrave Square! Ah! I warrant me the poor lady there, may want heart's-ease now for what *he* cares about the matter, for there 's a new fancy in his mind, I 'll be sworn."

"Well, well, Mary, that 's no business of ours. We must hear, see, and say nothing. But I often think to myself, that if husbands wanted to find out their wives' secrets, they might discover 'em by going round to our green-houses. They 'd then learn the prices, and mayhap the buyers, of the rare flowers their ladies have every day, and that would make 'em open their eyes. What husband, except during the honeymoon, would pay such sums for particular flowers as many a gentleman pays here?"

"Yes, Thomas, it 's all very true, and ladies might also find out, when those for whom they sometimes lose honour, and risk shame and disgrace, are playing 'em false, by inquiring at our green-houses, what flowers are now bought by certain gentlemen, and where they are sent to?"

"It 's all the better for our trade, Mary, that such questions are seldom asked, or if asked, that we are too cute to answer 'em."

"It sometimes makes me sad, Thomas, to think that such *innocent things* as flowers should be used for sinful purposes. *Sure their delicate* colours, lovely bloom, and fragrant scent, *ought to remind* one of the Giver of all good, who has yielded them *to please us*, and ought to chase evil thoughts away. But, for-

getful of this, these beautiful things, that live but for a day, are sent to breathe secret but evil thoughts, where sometimes a letter dare not be sent or a visit paid, and they turn to be the messengers of sin and do the work of corruption. Little does a husband think, when he sees a fine nosegay on the table of his handsome wife, or in her bosom, or held with pleasure to her nose, that it speaks to her as plainly, but more secretly than words could do, of some false friend, whom he has received into his house, and who is planning his dishonour."

"You 're always for going to the end of things, Mary, and you remind me of what you read out of the book one day about, seeing sermons in stones. For you 'd make a sermon out of flowers, and spoil our trade into the bargain."

"No Thomas, I wouldn't, but I 'd let no man, were I a gentleman, give a nosegay to my wife. I 'd have only gentlemen going to be married or wishing to be so, have the privilege of sending nosegays to those they have proposed for, and then flowers would be looked on as the messengers of honest, lawful love, instead of sinful."

"Lord love your simple heart, Mary, if that was the case we nursery-men would starve."

When Lord Willamere's *bouquet* was sent to Mrs. Stratford, she was half tempted to return it; but the fear of having the appearance of attaching too much importance to so trifling a gift, and of exciting the remarks of his Lordship's servants, deterred her. For the first time, the sight and perfume of these beautiful offsprings of summer failed to give her pleasure, for, though a passionate admirer of flowers, — and those sent to her were peculiarly fine — they were associated in her mind with the humiliating consciousness that the donor entertained towards her sentiments less accordant with the respect due to a virtuous woman, to which she thought herself entitled, than with the insolent freedom adopted by libertines to women, who by their levity had encouraged such advances.

Sterne, no mean judge of the female heart, has said, "that *a man has seldom an* offer of kindness to make to a woman, *without her having* a presentiment of it some moments before;"

and we would maintain that no married woman, however pure and innocent, has ever had the misfortune — and a serious one it may be deemed — of inspiring a passion in the breast of a man, without suspecting it, even before he has presumed to make the guilty avowal. Let no woman therefore — at least no woman with the quick sense of propriety, peculiar to every one of the sex before being tainted by a contact with the demoralized — plead in extenuation for having her ear insulted by a declaration of unhallowed passion, that "it came unexpectedly on her, that she was not prepared for it;" assertions too often had recourse to by coquettes, whose love of admiration had led them to give a tacit encouragement to such avowals; yet whose prudence induced them to shrink back, alarmed at the precipice on whose edge they found themselves trembling. Let them remember the verse which truly says,

"He comes too near, who comes to be denied;"

and be convinced that although a woman may retain sufficient virtue to repel a seducer, she has lost a portion of her purity and dignity in having permitted a declaration of love.

Looking on the flowers before her as a tacit avowal of a more than common interest in seeking to please her, Mrs. Stratford determined not to retain them. But how were they to be disposed of? She reflected for a few minutes, and, no other plan suggesting itself, she opened the casement of her bedroom and flung the *bouquet* from it. She felt more at ease when it had disappeared, yet she wished that Lord Willamere could know, without her having the ungracious task of informing him, how unvalued had been his gift, and how unwelcome would be any future one. How little did she imagine that the very step she had adopted, had accomplished this wish of hers!

Lord Willamere had gone to his stables, — an unusual occurrence with him — to be present while a veterinary surgeon examined the foot of a favourite horse which had met with an accident, and was returning to his house across the leads at the back of it, when the *bouquet* lying before him attracted his eyes. Was it possible that a gift of *his* had been thus scornfully rejected? Yet it must be so. It was the identical one which an hour before he had sent

to Mrs. Stradford, the windows of whose bed-chamber looked out on the leads! Could it have been her husband who in a fit of jealousy had flung them away? There was a salve to his vanity in this supposition, and men always are disposed to believe what most gratifies their besetting foible. Yes, it *must* be that uxorious fool Stratford who threw them away — Mrs. Stratford *had* accepted them, consequently *she* was not likely to have done the deed. Nevertheless, to put an end to all misgivings, he went to the bureau where his secretary was writing, and there sate that individual intent on his occupation, and with a pile of neatly filled pages of *précis* writing, that proved he had not abandoned his task during his lordship's absence. "You have worked hard to-day, Stratford," observed Lord Willamere.

"Yes, my lord, rather, for I have not quitted my desk since the morning."

"The devil you have not!" thought my lord; "it was she then after all who threw away the flowers! She really provokes me into a perseverance of my efforts to vanquish her prudery, even though I may not prove successful. Had she been as willing to commence a flirtation with me as three parts of the women I meet in society are, I should probably have not felt half so strong a desire to make an impression on her as I now do; but, to be foiled by an obscure governess, the wife too of my secretary, and under my own roof, would be too bad. I should for ever lose my reputation as a *homme des bonnes fortunes*, a reputation now so long and triumphantly sustained; ay, *so long*—there's the devil of it; perhaps it is because I am not so youthful as I was, that I am thus scornfully treated."

And Lord Willamere sighed, and cast a melancholy glance in the small mirror that hung near his desk. How frequently had that same glass showed him the reflection of his own face, when meditating, or flushed with conquest, he had contemplated it with complacency, while latterly, and more especially now, it revealed to him the ravages of the ruthless tyrant Time, denoted by locks besprent with silver; and, oh! how much fewer, and further *between, than some summers* before; and certain harsh lines *around his eyes, vulgarly* but expressively denominated crow's-

feet. His complexion, too, had somewhat "fallen into the sere and yellow leaf," and the muscles extending from the cheeks to the chin came out in an *alto relievo*, by no means desirable for a man who still had pretensions to disturb the peace of female hearts.

Yet this humiliating contemplation of his own altered appearance, far from discouraging him to persevere in his attempts to conquer the affections of Mrs. Stratford, only served to pique his vanity into achieving it. Yes, he would prove, that he was still, though a less handsome, quite as dangerous a man as ever; and he who had vanquished so many high-born dames, would not have the mortification of being defeated by a mere nobody, who, though certainly extremely beautiful, could not be a conquest to make any sensation in society. *A-propos*, of high-born dames, he remembered that he had in his pocket an unopened letter from the Duchess of Rosehampton. He had received it some hours before, when on the point of mounting his horse to go and buy the *bouquet* for her who had so scornfully flung it away, and had ever since forgotten it as completely as its writer. "Full of reproaches, I dare say," thought he, as he now opened the billet, embossed with a ducal coronet in gold and redolent with perfume. "Yes, the old story: where have I been? what have I been doing? and why has she not seen, or heard from me? 'Time was when I counted the hours that kept me from her, but now — not even a *bouquet* for three whole days.' Yes, yes, the old story," thought Lord Willamere, as he tore the billet into atoms, "'Time *was*,' so they all say. How many billets with the same reproaches have I not received. By Jove! one might imagine all were written by the same hand, so precisely similar are they. It is odd, that, with so much imagination, women should not possess the power of varying their phrases on such occasions, instead of always writing the self-same reproaches.

"The poor duchess! I wish I had thought of buying her some heart's-ease to-day; she needs it, if I may trust her letter. The fellow, too, reminded me that he had procured some. But how *the devil can a man* remember to buy a bouquet for one woman, *when his whole* thoughts are occupied by another? I am half *tempted to send* her the one so scornfully rejected by her rival.

but, no, that won't do, for she is so quick-sighted that she would instantly divine that it was designed for some one else, so I must not increase the jealousy that I see by her letter is already awakened in her breast. The poor duchess! I could really pity her, when I remember how passionately, how madly I once loved her, making her believe, ay, by Jove! and believing myself also at the time, that our love was to endure for ever! But what is a poor devil of a fellow to do, when satiety and indifference take the place of passion, the never-failing result of a successful one? Of all ghosts, defend me from the ghost of departed love, which haunts one, to scare away the hopes and joys that usher in a new attachment. Well, I suppose I must call on the poor duchess. It will be some consolation for the wound just inflicted on my *amour propre* by Mrs. Stratford, to see one of the most admired of our aristocratic beauties, and the leader of fashion too, pale from anxiety occasioned by my absence, and delighted to see me again. Poor duchess! how many men envy me your smiles, and would give half their possessions to exchange places with me in your favour, while I, for three whole days, have forgotten your existence, and am only reminded of it by a letter filled with tender reproaches? Willamere, Willamere, you're a sad dog!" and here the coxcomb again glanced in the mirror; "how many women's hearts have you not vanquished, while the stupid world believed you were engaged only on protocols, and defeating the tactics of foreign diplomatists? Oh! the relief of flying from the dry details of official duty, to the elegant boudoir, redolent of perfume, of some lovely creature, fierce and haughty to every man save yourself; in whose presence one can forget the wily arts of contemporary political opponents, and the crooked policy of other nations! Yes, I flatter myself, that I have shone in the cabinet as well as in the boudoir," and Lord Willamere drew up his head, and arranged his well-tied neckcloth. "People are mistaken, when they fancy that a handsome man, and a well-dressed one too, seldom makes a good man of business. I have proved the fallacy of this opinion, and I defy any one to say that while indulging in *affaires de cœur* I have neglected les affaires *de tête.*"

CHAPTER IV.

"MAY I claim a few moments of your lordship's time?" asked Lord Willamere's secretary, with a timid and embarrassed air, when *tête-à-tête* next day with his employer.

"Certainly, certainly," was the answer; but his lordship's countenance betrayed some confusion as he seated himself.

"The creditors, my lord, have been very clamorous of late, and threaten to put executions into the house."

"You have told them, I suppose, that such a step would be unavailing?" replied Lord Willamere, his countenance assuming its usual expression of dignified calmness. The truth was, he feared Mr. Stratford was about to speak to him on a subject that interested him infinitely more than his debts, namely, the wife of the said secretary: for the old proverb, "a guilty conscience needs no accuser," was verified in his case, and his equanimity became restored when he found that it was only about his creditors that he was to be spoken to.

"Yes, my lord, I told them that your furniture, plate, books, &c., were assigned over to another creditor. They then declared their intention of seizing your carriages and horses, when I assured them that both were jobbed, on which they got very angry, and said they would at least endeavour to annoy your lordship by exposure, for they would have executions, and seizures made, and afterwards try the cases in court."

"This, Stratford, would, I confess, be anything but agreeable. You must see these harpies again: temporise with them if you can; if not, we must raise some more money by bills, a thing I don't like if it can be avoided.

"It is a ruinous system, my lord, and as likely eventually to lead to exposure as the measure it is meant to prevent."

"Well, see what you can do with these people, Stratford; talk them over, promise them that in a year, or, if that will not do, six months, they shall be paid.

"I have so often held out promises never realized, that they no longer put faith in what I say;" and Stratford changed colour at

the consciousness of having not only lost the respect of Lord Willamere's creditors, but his own too, by having deluded them with false promises.

"Something must turn up," resumed his lordship, "in the course of the next six months to enable me to pay a portion at least, of the debts, to these troublesome people."

"Ay, so you have said every six months of the last seven years," thought his secretary, "and with no better prospect of the realization of such unfounded hope than at present." But he did not give utterance to this thought, for his was too delicate a mind to add to his patron's annoyances by aught like a reproach. Again, Lord Willamere arose to depart, and once more his secretary begged him to stay for a few minutes, but this time the request was made with much more diffidence and embarrassment of manner than before. "If not *very* inconvenient to your lordship, might I solicit some money on my own account? As a married man, I have more occasion for money than formerly."

"Very true, my good Stratford; and *your* wants must be the first attended to. But at this moment I happen to be poorer than usual. I can only spare you ten pounds; but in a few days you shall have more."

His lordship gave a cheque on his banker for the money, rather wincing while he did so, as the recollection crossed his mind, that only a few pounds more of his remained in the said banker's hands, and that his next quarter's salary was already half anticipated. "If my time were not so wholly occupied by official business and *affaires de cœur*," thought he, as he drove in his cabriolet to the Duchess of Rosehampton's, "I should be hipped to death by my pecuniary embarrassments. By Jove! they are enough to torment a man out of his senses if he had time to think of them. Luckily for me I have not, so the *onus* falls on Stratford. I wish he had not taken my ten pounds just now, though, for he has scarcely left me a sovereign for my *menus plaisirs*. *A-propos* of sovereigns, what a blessing it is to have one, — not the golden *effigy, though that in* the plural number, to a large amount, *is not to be found fault with*; but a *bonâ fide* sovereign of flesh and *blood, requiring* ministers, ay, and paying them well too, through

the assistance of Parliament, making them feel satisfied when every quarter-day comes round, if they are so on no other."

Here his lordship's soliloquy was stopped by his arrival at Rosehampton House. He threw the reins on the splash-board of the cabriolet, while his diminutive cab boy ran to the horse 's head, which even on tiptoes he could scarcely reach, and his master, descending from the vehicle, ascended the steps.

An accurate observer might have noticed that there was much less elasticity in his step, and much less animation in his countenance, than on former visits to this mansion, and these symptoms might have revealed the state of his feelings towards its noble mistress.

"Well, I see 'd a funny thing this 'ere day, William," said Lord Willamere's upper house-maid to his lordship's groom, as they met in the servants' hall to have a sociable cup of tea together, on the evening of the day that the *bouquet* had been bought at the nursery-garden.

"And what did you see, Hannah?"

"Why, I see 'd his lordship pick up as fine a nosegay as ever I looked upon in all my born days, as he was a crossing the leads coming in from the stable; and, what 's more, I see 'd Mrs. Stratford, not five minutes before, throw the same nosegay out of her window. I can't be sworn that I see 'd her face, but I see 'd her hand, and a precious small white vone it is for the matter of that, as it pitched the flowers out. Thinks I to myself, you might give them 'ere flowers to a poor servant, if how be it you did not like to keep 'em yourself, instead of throwing 'em out on the leads to be spoilt; but when I see's his lordship pick them up and carry them into the house, marry come up, says I, you might have sent my lord the nosegay civilly, and not throw 'em out of the window to fall in his way. Some people are so handsome, that they think other people must be sure to admire 'em, and be glad to pick up the flowers they throw out of the window; but I knows what I knows, and I 'm no blinder than others; and when some *people are asked* to dine with lords, just for all the world as if they *were born ladies* instead of only being governesses, it is not for *nothing I 'm* certain."

"How your tongue does run on, Hannah, to be sure, twenty-four to the dozen at least. Why, my lord bought a nosegay at the nursery-man's to day; and, what 's more, paid a golden sovereign for it, for I saw him pull it out of his waistcoat pocket and throw it down on the counter; and moreover, I thought to myself, it 's no wonder we poor servants can't get our wages, when our masters give a sovereign for a nosegay."

Lord! William, you don't say so! Is it possible that any one would give twenty shillings, a whole month of my wages, for a few flowers?"

"Little you know, Hannah, what lords and gentlemen will do when the fancy takes them; Lord help you, they think no more of money than of dust."

"Ay, William, and that 's the reason that so many of 'em comes to want it. But what became of the nosegay his lordship bought?"

"I brought it home wrapped up in paper and handed it at the door to the porter."

"And I took it from the porter, and carried it with his lordship's compliments to Mrs. Stratford," said a footman who had heard the conversation between the house-maid and groom.

"Then as sure as day," exclaimed William, "it was the nosegay my lord sent her that she threw out of the window."

"You may be sure," said the footman, "for I noticed that she did not seem much pleased with the present, for she hesitated a minute before she took it from my hands; and looked as if she had more than half a mind to send it back."

"Well, the himperance of some people! where will it stop? Throw a nosegay that cost twenty shillings, and was sent her by a lord; and her husband's master, and hers too, as a body may say, out of the window! She ought to be ashamed of herself!"

"Perhaps she wished to show his lordship that she cared neither for him or his nosegay," remarked Thomas, the footman. "And that 's my hopinion, for I saw, the day she dined with my *Lord, that he was continually looking at her; and well he might for the matter of that,* for a handsomer face, or a more heleganter *figure I have seldom see'd.*"

"Then you must have been blind, Mr. Thomas," exclaimed Hannah with warmth; "for, to my thinking, Mrs. Stratford is anything but ansome. Why she has no more colour in her cheeks than a white rose with just a little pink shade in the middle; and her eyelashes are so long, that one can hardly see the colour of her eyes; and her hair is jet black — I can't abide black hair," (Hannah had red,) "and she 's moreover so distant, and so shy like, that there 's nothing free and easy about her, as there was in the governess at my last place. Ah! Miss Cullen was a very different person, so full of fun and frolic. She 'd come down when master and mistress were out and the children asleep, and play blind-man's-buff in the servants' hall with us as pleasant as possible, and we were all as free with her, as if she were one of ourselves."

"All that 's mighty well, Hannah; but to my thinking, governesses as don't know their places, aren't fit for 'em. They aren't hired to romp in the servants' hall, but to attend to the learning and behaviour of the children entrusted to their care. A governess ought to be as much like a lady as possible; and as for Mrs. Stratford, I 'm sure I never see'd a lady more genteel."

"Marry come up, Mr. Thomas, who made you such a judge of ladies?"

"Waiting on 'em, Mrs. Hannah, to be sure. Servants who wait at table, have a good opportunity of judging of those who think no more of their presence than if they were stocks or stones; and I have often formed my own hopinions while they were eating and chatting."

"Well, you may think as you like, Mr. Thomas, but you 'll never get me to believe it was ladylike in Mrs. Stratford to throw his lordship's flowers out of window, and in his own house too. What do *you* think, Sally?"

This question was addressed to a very pretty young woman who had entered while Thomas was speaking, and who filled the situation of under-housemaid.

"Ay, Sally, do you think that if my lord sent a nosegay to *Mrs. Stratford*, and that she thought it wasn't right to keep it, it

was wrong of her to throw it out of the window?" demanded Thomas, with an air of anxiety.

"I don't see what else she could do with it, Thomas. If she kept it, it would, to my thinking, be like saying she approved of my lord's attention."

"Right, Sally, right," exclaimed Thomas, with a look of great satisfaction; "I was sure *you* would think as I do."

"Well, if I was my lord," said Hannah, "I 'd see Mrs. Stratford far enough, I can tell her, before I 'd send her any nosegays at a sovereign a piece. What 's she, that she 's to be made so much of, I should like to know?"

"She 's a well behaved, *vartuous* woman, that 's what she is, Hannah, who wishes to keep her own place, and let my lord keep his; and if she can manage that, it will be no easy matter, for his lordship can never see a handsome face without trying to make a fool of the owner, and more shame for him."

Thomas glanced so expressively at the blushing face of pretty Sally, that it was clear his indignation at his lord's laxity of morals was not wholly disinterested; while Hannah, growing red with anger, declared, "that for her part, she never had nothink whatsomedever to say against his lordship; though she 'd met him many's the time in the dressing and bed-room, he 'd never been himperant to her; though other people," and she glanced spitefully at pretty Sally, "were always trying to keep out of his way;" an assertion the truth of which no one present seemed disposed to question.

While Lord Willamere was devising schemes to seduce the wife of his secretary, unchecked by one feeling of remorse, that unhappy man was submitting to the humiliation of going to creditor after creditor, in order to talk them over into waiting another year, or even six months, for the settlement of their accounts; conscious all the while, that there existed no more likelihood of their being paid at the termination of the time demanded, than at the present. So often had these promises been made, and so ill kept, that the patience of the creditors of Lord Willamere was exhausted, and the reproaches, which they were denied an opportunity of uttering

to his lordship, were directed with unsparing acerbity to his secretary.

"I'll tell you what, Mr. Stratford, you can no longer make me believe that if Lord Willamere had the principle to pay, he could not find the means," said Mr. Bloxam, the butcher. "Why what becomes of his salary? Ay, tell me that. Hav'n't I been renewing his bills till I'm tired of 'em. *I* must pay for my meat, and why shouldn't he?"

This was only a specimen of the scenes which Stratford had to go through with all the persons who served the establishment of Lord Willamere. The servants, too, demanded their long arrears of wages in a tone that might have conveyed their belief that Mr. Stratford alone was answerable for the delay; and the tradespeople to whom he was indebted for the supply of his own wants, — wants limited to the strict necessaries of life, — had now also become importunate.

He would return in an evening, fatigued in body and depressed in mind, to seek consolation from the partner of his joys and sorrows; but, alas! the joys were "like angel visits, few and far between," while the cares were of daily and increasing occurrence. In vain did his fond wife endeavour to soothe his broken spirits, and to render their frugal meals cheerful. The privations and discomforts, which, in spite of her attempts to conceal them, were but too apparent, were now more severely felt than if he alone had to bear them; and his affection for her doubly increased his acute sense of the hardships of their lot. Bitterly did he now reproach himself for his selfishness in withdrawing her from comparative comfort to almost positive want; and when he learned that she was in a state likely to make him a father in some months hence, the tidings that under happier circumstances would have filled his heart with gladness, now only added to his gloom. His Emily never blessed with robust health, became more delicate every day, and evidently required comforts which his poverty precluded the possibility of his providing for her. Her resignation, and her attempts to maintain a cheerfulness under a complication of evils that would have tested the firmness of a stoic, often brought tears to his eyes; and as he beheld her during the

long evenings, occupied in converting her own slender stock of clothes into habiliments for their unborn infant, he would reflect with many a pang, how her scanty wardrobe now melting away was to be replenished, and how so frail a form was to suffice for the maternal duties and housewivery cares his idolized Emily would be called on to fulfil. What, too, would be the fate of their poor child? Was it to be doomed to pine through the vicissitudes of a dreary life of dependence, making its unfortunate parents reflect with still more bitterness on a union, that, were they but blessed with a modest competency, they would have felt to be indeed a blissful one? Poverty, thou gaunt spectre, whose approach fills all with dread; who frightest away summer friends even more rapidly than winter chases away the poor insects that basked in sunshine, never art thou so terrible, as when we behold thy chilling results on those dearer to us than life itself, and yet have not the power to ward off thy presence.

Lord Willamere had not desisted from his evil intentions towards the wife of his secretary, although foiled in his repeated attempts to find an opportunity of carrying them into effect. Many had been the visits offered, and the invitations to dinner given on his part to Mr. and Mrs. Stratford; but the ill health of the latter offered so strong a plea for rejecting both, that, although he was unwillingly compelled to postpone following up his schemes against her honour, he was by no means disposed to abandon them. Often would he send the most rare and costly fruit to the invalid, purchased at a price that would have abundantly supplied the substantial comforts and necessaries of which she stood in so much need; but what knew he of the privations which his extravagance and recklessness entailed on those who depended on him for subsistence? *He* never experienced any privations, save the temporary want of some useless luxury or expensive bauble, which, when his finances were low, he might have denied himself for some time, but which, when his purse was again filled, he indulged himself in. That any one beneath his roof should be in *actual want of a substantial*, if not a dainty meal, never once *entered his thoughts*, and, if it had, he would in all probability *have pronounced the* person a fool, for not seeking, as he did,

the supply of all wants by rushing into debt, without ever thinking how such debts were to be discharged. The fact was, Lord Willamere avoided, as much as possible ever reflecting on disagreeable subjects, and piqued himself not a little on this proof of his epicurean philosophy. *He* fared luxuriously every day either at the tables of his friends, or at his own, and it never occurred to him, that the woman he most admired, and the man he most trusted, had barely sufficient food to support existence.

A portion of the next quarter's salary having been allotted to the tradespeople who supplied Willamere House, they consented to renew once more the bills of his lordship, already so often renewed; but on the proviso that his secretary should indorse them.

"The impudent scoundrels!" exclaimed Lord Willamere. "But of course, Stratford, you 'll sign them. It is a mere matter of form insisted on by these harpies to pique me."

"If I possessed the means to meet the bills when due, readily, my lord, would I indorse them; but it strikes me that, as there is no probability of this being the case, it would not be honest on my part to do so."

"Really this is carrying your scruples to a very absurd extent, Stratford. It is not what I looked for in a man whom I believed perfectly devoted to my interests. The moment you refuse what these rascals require, you will have inflicted a mortal wound on my credit; for they will naturally enough say, 'Why his bills can be worth nothing when his own secretary, who best knows his affairs, will not indorse them,'"

This argument was irresistible with Stratford, not that his conscience was at all convinced by it, but that he saw his refusal would not only seriously offend Lord Willamere, but totally destroy his already straitened credit with his tradespeople. He signed the bills, and from that moment became haunted with the dread that he had committed an act that would entail misery on him at no distant day; and this addition to his troubles achieved the ruin of his health, already greatly impaired by constant anxiety and privations.

CHAPTER V.

QUICKLY did his doting wife detect the change in her husband's aspect. His heavy eyes, pale and haggard cheeks, and the sickly smile that tried to re-assure her, when alarmed by these symptoms she tremblingly questioned their cause, but too well convinced her that the pressure of hard necessity at present, and the dread of actual want hereafter, were preying on his life. And this, — this was the sad result of her compliance with his long, and often reiterated prayers for her consent to their union! Oh! why had she yielded to it, against the dictates of her own better judgment. Had their marriage brought happiness to *him*, she would have borne with fortitude all the privations induced by poverty. But when did happiness and poverty dwell together? Does not the former terrified, quickly fly away, when the latter shows its grim face? Alas, yes! How brief had been their felicity! A few halcyon days, and now cankering cares had scared away peace; and Love, — Love only, had remained to confront the dire spectre Poverty. And was not Love itself, in this cruel position, an addition to their misery? Did it not, in the pity, the anxiety it awakened in their breasts for each other, aggravate, ten-fold, their sufferings? Could she have experienced, for herself alone, one half the inquietude, the sleepless, agonizing inquietude, that filled her tortured heart for him? Ah, no! well she knew she could not, and were *he* but exempted from the hardships of their position, *she* could bear them without a murmur. Such were the bitter reflections that continually filled the minds of both husband and wife; increasing their mutual tenderness to an almost morbid state of exaltation which like a fever preyed upon their lives, and prostrated their mental energies.

When the time for his wife's *accouchement* drew near, Mr. Stratford demanded from Lord Willamere for her use, the money, which for his own, a delicacy amounting to weakness would have precluded him from urging.

"How unfortunate that you did not ask me yesterday, my good fellow," replied his lordship; "but as my ill luck would have it,

I lost last night at whist all the money I had, and was just thinking of asking you to look out for some one who would cash a bill for me. If you know any one who will do so, your wants shall be the first attended to from the produce."

There was something so like a bribe, to do that which he so much disliked, held out in the promise that his wants should be the first attended to, that Stratford's sensitiveness was wounded, and there was a self-respect, almost amounting to dignity of manner, in his air, when he declared that, however pressing his wants were, he preferred bearing the annoyance to continuing a system so ruinous to his lordship, as that of raising money at such exorbitant interest.

"*Your* wants, Stratford, must then be much less pressing than *mine*, the relief for which cannot, I am sorry to say, be postponed," replied Lord Willamere, "so you must assist me on this occasion. I am going to the country to-morrow, to stay a few days at the Duke of Evandale 's, and money I must have."

"Could he but see, and hear the conversation of the man to whom he sends me to borrow money," thought Stratford, as he wended his way to a money-lender in Chancery Lane, "he would be less ready to have recourse to such men, and more careful in managing his resources. Where will all this end?"

This was a question that often presented itself to his mind of late, when on his sleepless pillow he reflected with alarm on the heavy liabilities he had incurred for Lord Willamere, and remembered the utter carelessness of that nobleman in all pecuniary matters, as well as his own total inability to meet any portion of them. At last he reached the house of Mr. Solomons, and after waiting half-an-hour in a dark and dingy room, ill ventilated and containing only three or four rickety chairs, and a table covered with a cloth, on which various devices were scrawled with ink, and sundry spots of grease, and stains of wine or beer were visible, he was summoned to the *sanctum* of Mr. Solomons, and ushered there by a lad of some sixteen years old, *whose pale and* elongated face spoke as ill for the larder of his *employer, as his* thread-bare and greasy coat did for his liberality *in providing him* with clothing.

"So here you are again, Mr. Stratford," exclaimed Mr. Solomons, his coarse mouth relaxing into an ironical smile; "I didn't expect to see you here so soon, after all you said against raising money by bills. I hope you ain't come here for any such purpose now, for two reasons: first, I don't like to see a gentleman act contrary to his conscience, and you said it went against yours to pay fifty per cent. for raising money; and secondly, never was cash so scarce in the city as at present — no getting it, I can assure you. Why there 's my Lord Duke of Deloraine has told me, he won't object to paying sixty, ay, or even sixty-five per cent. if I can get his grace five thousand pounds for six months. 'Can't be done, my lord duke,' says I. 'Must be done, Mr. Solomons,' says he, 'for I positively want the money.' 'I might manage it at *three* months, your grace,' says I, 'but at six months I couldn't do it for Her Majesty herself, if she required it.' 'Well, at three months then I suppose it must be,' says his grace; and I managed it at sixty-five per cent., but it is not for every one I could or would have done it, I can tell you."

"I want cash for a bill of Lord Willamere's for two hundred and fifty pounds, Mr. Solomons, and require it to be at six months."

"Quite out of the question, Sir, quite out of the question. You may suppose that if I refused my Lord Duke of Deloraine, one of the best customers I have, a nobleman that never makes the slightest objection to any rate of interest I demand, I am not likely to do it for Lord Willamere, who sends you here huckstering and beating down my terms in a manner that is by no means the one I like to do business in."

The blood mounted to the temples of poor Stratford, while he listened to this coarse reproach, but he felt that it would not be prudent to resent it; for well did he know, that ill-disposed as was Mr. Solomons to lend the required accommodation, the other money-lenders with whom he had dealt for Lord Willamere, were still less inclined to discount his bills. "Will you tell me at once, Mr. Solomons, what you will accept for cashing a bill at three months, and whether or not, I may count on you re-

newing it at the expiration of that term, for as many more months?"

"Well then, Mr. Stratford, at a word, I am ready to find you the money, (you are of course aware I have no funds myself,) at sixty-five per cent., and a *douceur* for myself for the renewal. I will not be unreasonable; twenty-five pounds will satisfy me, but less than that I will not take."

"I must consult Lord Willamere, before I can accept such very extravagant conditions."

"And extravagant as you are pleased to consider them, I may not be in the humour to offer them again. Money was never so scarce in the market. Every one wants it, and I have at present no less than eight noblemen on my list, who will give me a higher rate of interest than Lord Willamere."

Stratford returned to his patron's, and acquainted him with the hard conditions named by Mr. Solomons, adding, that to accept them would be little short of madness.

"We must, nevertheless, do so, my good fellow," replied Lord Willamere; "there is no help for it; for, since you left this, confidently counting on your accomplishing the loan, I have bought a very fine horse, which was brought here for me to see, and the dealer insists on having ready money for him. I have made a capital bargain, for I have got him to take a hundred and fifty less, in consideration of paying him ready money. He refused selling him for two hundred and fifty to Lord George Devereux, who offered him a bill at six months. You must therefore go back to Solomons, and close with him on his own terms. I wish you had done so at once, for I want the money confoundedly."

The bill was cashed, Mr. Solomons making a great merit of not having swerved from his conditions, which he declared he considered himself fully warranted in doing, owing to Mr. Stratford not having at once closed with them; but he took care to retain the sixty-five per cent. interest in advance, in spite of all Stratford's remonstrances to the contrary, saying, he always of late made a point of it, to prevent his clients suffering from the unpunctuality of noblemen and gentlemen.

This deduction so far diminished the sum raised, that, when it was handed over to Lord Willamere, he uttered "curses not loud, but deep," on the grasping scoundrel, as he termed Mr. Solomons; and avowed that now, however he might regret it, it was totally out of his power to appropriate any portion of it to the wants of his secretary. "Devilish sorry, Stratford, but I can't help it, I can't, by Jove! It can't make much difference to you, whether you have the money now or in a fortnight hence. A devilish great bore to be compelled to give up the horse too! hang that rascal Solomons. I must send my groom to say I have changed my mind about the horse, and won't buy him."

That evening the poor secretary wandered into a remote street to the house of a pawnbroker which he had often noticed in his rambles, and there raised ten guineas on his gold watch and chain, worth thrice that sum, in order that the hour of trial of his wife now daily expected, should not find him penniless; and when he returned to her, he endeavoured to assume a cheerful aspect as he pressed her to his heart. He assisted her with almost feminine forethought and activity in preparing for the little stranger, whose birth they anticipated with trembling anxiety; and having secured the attendance of the nurse of his wife, a respectable and attached though humble friend, he waited with a trepidation known only to those who feel that the object dearer to them than life is in danger, the event so long looked forward to.

The following night I opened my eyes on this world of care, and was as fondly pressed to the breast of my poor father, as if I were the heiress to broad lands and a long line of ancient ancestry. The extreme delicacy of my mother's health induced her medical adviser to prohibit her attempting to nurse; and the narrow circumstances of my parents precluding them from engaging a wet nurse, my mother determined on rearing me by hand. Her health seemed to revive; and when she left her sick chamber, the few who saw her, thought her looking more beautiful than ever. Lord Willamere offered himself as sponser to the infant; and his kind sister, Lady Altonbury, proposed being the godmother. When he paid his first visit to the young mother, her increased loveliness re-awakened the evil thoughts that had

been slumbering in his mind since her arrival beneath his roof. He tried that generally sure road to a mother's heart, praises of her infant, and, affecting to admire children, pronounced that I was one of the prettiest he had ever seen. Flattered by his commendations of me, and thinking that in her new character of a mother, Lord Willamere would find more to respect than admire, in a woman wholly occupied by her husband and child, she forgot that she had ever seen aught in his manner that indicated any sentiment of a more personal nature on his part towards her; and she consequently evinced less reserve in her reception of him, although the most rigid and scrupulous disciplinarian in female decorum could have detected nothing to censure in her manner.

Women, far less pure-minded and reserved than Mrs. Stratford, find, on first becoming a mother, a material change in their feelings and notions. There is something so purifying, so sacred in maternity, that its benign influence corrects vanity and sobers down levity. Unhappily, circumstances too often occur which abridge the duration of this holy influence, but few can deny that it has existed. Many a vain coquette has forgotten self in the love excited for her offspring, and has felt more gratified by the admiration bestowed on its beauty than by all the commendations ever given to her own. If such is the effect produced by maternity on minds of ordinary stamp, its result on one of so superior a nature as Mrs. Stratford's, may easily be imagined. A woman of the most advanced age could not have supposed herself more wholly out of the pale of libertine pursuits than she did now, when to her matronly character was added that of a mother. Deeply impressed with a sense of the sacred duties this new tie involved, she in the innocence of her heart, believed that it invested her in the eyes of others with as holy a shield from sinful thoughts as it did in her own. Hence the change in her manner, which, although less formal and reserved, was nevertheless all that decorum and female dignity could desire.

Lady Altonbury came to London expressly to answer at the *baptismal font* for the little stranger, and the knowledge so fully *impressed on* the mind of Mrs. Stratford of the seriousness and

importance which that amiable and excellent lady attached to the duties of a godmother, was a source of comfort to her, now that Lady Altonbury had undertaken them for her child. On the day of the christening, Lord Willamere voluntarily promised his secretary, that all his influence should be exerted to procure him an appointment the first vacancy that occurred; and this unsolicited pledge on his part would have convinced Mrs. Stratford, had any doubt still remained in her mind, that he no longer entertained any warmer sentiment than good will towards herself.

Not long, however, was she suffered to remain in this belief. Lord Willamere under the plea of coming to inquire after the health of his goddaughter, sought occasions to visit her; and although he never did so without apprising his secretary, carelessly saying, "I will just step up and see Mrs. Stratford and my little godchild," both husband and wife began to find that these calls were more frequent than they wished, and heartily longed for the promised appointment, which would enable them to leave a house where they could not be safe from the intrusion of the owner.

And now the time drew near when the bills indorsed by Stratford were to fall due, he reminded Lord Willamere of the fact, and urged as strongly as he could the necessity of making a provision to meet them. They had been once renewed as had been agreed on, but Mr. Solomons had on that occasion frankly declared his intention of not again granting their renewal. When told of this, Lord Willamere had assured his secretary that the money should be forthcoming, but these repeated assurances had failed to remove the anxiety that haunted him. Too well were his worst fears justified when, the day the bills fell due, Lord Willamere confessed his inability to meet them, and advised Stratford to leave town, or conceal himself in some obscure corner of it until he could obtain money to satisfy Mr. Solomons. The advice came too late. While the poor secretary was meditating where he should go to, and how to break this annoying intelligence to his wife, *at that moment greatly* distressed by the illness of her child, *he was arrested. Lord* Willamere was absent at the House of *Lords, when this mortifying* event occurred. His lordship's so-

licitor, to whom Stratford wrote, was not to be found; an sheriff's officer after waiting an hour at the request of his pris and seeing that further delay was not likely to tend to any A tages to himself, peremptorily insisted on his accompanyin to his abode, there to wait until Lord Willamere's solicitor be found. Dreading to have an interview with his wife und distressing circumstances of the moment, he wrote a few li her, to be delivered in case he did not return at night, left a detailing the state of the case, for Lord Willamere, and th signed himself to his fate.

"I suppose, Sir, as how you would wish for us to go to Street in a carriage?" said Mr. Moses.

"As you please," replied the inexperienced Stratford.

"No, Sir; not as I, but as you pleases. It bain't noth me whatsomnever to be seen going along the streets with *you* 't will do your credit no good, I can tell you, for *you* to b with *me*. I 'm well known, though I say it as shouldn't perhaps, for being the smartest man in my profession in all don. I 'm always picked out for doing business with gentl at the west end of the town; and gentlemen as are really right sort, never find me uncivil, or against granting 'em accommodation as lies in my power; provided they can aff and are willing to pay for it."

"Let us have a carriage then," said the secretary; an being called, he and his accommodating companion enter and were driven off to Searl Street.

Misfortunes, though long anticipated, fall not less h when they arrive. How often had a presentiment of the even had now occurred, haunted Stratford during the last six mo and chased sleep from his pillow; nevertheless the realizat his fears overwhelmed him, as much as if he had never previ thought of its probability. His wife, his child — the latter ill and suffering, and its anxious mother, so much needin presence to support and comfort her! What would be his fe feelings when she should learn the truth? and that she must it he felt but too assured, for he knew that at that moment *Willamere*, however he might wish to release him from dut

had not the funds at command to do so; and his knowledge of his lordship's solicitor, Mr. Spellerman, did not encourage him to hope that *he* would put himself to any inconvenience or trouble to extricate him, even though well aware that it was solely for the accommodation of his lordship, that his secretary had indorsed the bills.

"Well, he 's safe off, that 's certain," said Mr. Bermingham, the *Maître d'Hôtel* of Lord Willamere, as he saw from the window of his private room the carriage that contained Mr. Stratford and the sheriff's officer drive away. "I kept out of the way lest he should ask me to return him the sovereign he advanced me this morning. I saw he had no more in his purse; and I got that out of him by telling him there was not a shilling in the house to pay for letters or parcels. And not far from the truth neither, for the other servants haven't seen a farthing of their wages for the last six months, and I have taken good care not to keep a sixpence of mine by me. No, no; the minute I lay my hand on a five-pound note, I go off and lodge it in safe hands, where I can get interest for it. No, one shall catch me advancing a shilling for my lord. I 'm not such a fool. And I owe Mr. Stratford no obligations, I 'm sure. Quite the contrary, for he 's a regular skin-flint, and tries all he can to prevent me from having any profits out of my place. I could make a much better thing out of it if *he* were not in the house, looking after the cellar book, and doing a hundred other mean things, for which he 'll get but little thanks in the end, as I know. Why, the poor devil and his pretty wife half starve themselves rather than go in debt, and are too proud to touch any of my lord's things. More fools they, say I."

Sally, the under-housemaid, as good-natured as she was pretty, had, from the moment of Mrs. Stratford's arrival at Willamere House, taken a great liking to that lady. She had noticed the severe system of economy adhered to by the young couple, and with a quickness of perception peculiar to her sex, had divined the sentiments of Lord Willamere towards Mrs. Stratford; and had observed the reserve with which his attentions were treated.

"Yes," thought pretty Sally, "Mrs. Stratford is a virtuous and well-conducted lady, and it goes to my heart to see the trouble to

which she and her husband are driven. I 'm sure they hardly eat enough to keep body and soul together; and she 's always trying to save me trouble by doing every thing she can to keep her rooms neat and clean. It 's a pity to see true lovers so ill off;" and Sally heaved a deep sigh, partly from pity for my mother, and partly because she was reminded, by the case of my parents, of the consequences that result from improvident marriages, the dread of which had alone rendered her, for the last year, obdurate to the pleadings of Thomas the footman for their union. "Yes, it 's a terrible thing to see the person one loves wanting the comforts to which he or she has been accustomed," thought Sally; "and then to have a poor baby to face this cold hard-working world, without any thing to leave for its support, if death should snatch away its parents!"

CHAPTER VI.

The interest excited in Sally's breast for my mother led her continually to the chamber she occupied to perform a thousand little services and acts of kindness. She was ever ready to go of errands, to execute commissions, to take charge of the bread, butter, milk, and meat, brought to the house for the use of the young couple; and took especial care that no portion of any of these articles should be abstracted, a thing certain to have occurred, had she not interfered to prevent it. Thomas, too, lent his aid to protect the *comestibles* designed for the little *menage* on the second floor, and united with his beloved Sally in rendering every service in his power to my parents.

No sooner had he been made aware of the arrest of my father, — and the news was quickly spread through the house, — than he communicated it to his sweetheart.

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Sally, "what a terrible blow to the poor lady! and the dear little baby so ill too! They did not get a *wink of sleep all* night, I 'm sure, the poor child wailed so much; *and, although* I got up and went to their room to help to nurse it, *or be of use*, Mrs. Stratford wouldn't let me sit up. Ah! Thomas

you see what a sad thing it is for people to marry before they have laid by a little to make them comfortable!"

"So you are always saying, Sally; and yet time passes away, and our youth goes with it, while we are trying to scrape together a little sum to have to depend on in case of illness. It often makes me gloomy, Sally, when I think how long we 'll have to wait; although I 'm sure we do all we can to save money. We have neither of us tasted beer the last year, nor taken sugar in our tea, out of economy, yet how little it adds to our savings."

"Don't say so, Thomas. It will make a good many shillings at the year's end; and besides, leaving off sugar and beer now will enable us to do without them always. Do we feel a bit the worse, Thomas, since we left them off?"

"No, certainly, Sally; and for my part I think I feel better; but then, our fellow-servants jeer us, and that sometimes makes me half ashamed."

"You men, you men, Thomas, hav'n't half the courage of us women in such matters! *We* don't mind being jeered, when we know it's for a good cause. But, Lord bless me, here are we gossipping all this while, instead of doing our work. I 'll just run up and see if I can't be of some use to Mrs. Stratford. Poor lady, how I pity her!"

"And I 'll ask Mr. Bermingham's leave to get out for an hour or two, and run to Searl Street, to where I heard the bailiff order the fly to be driven."

"Do, dear Thomas. It will be a comfort to poor Mr. Stratford to see some face that he knows in that dismal prison. Oh! it makes me tremble to think of the poor gentleman shut up with iron bars on every side!"

"It 's not quite so bad as that yet, Sally; for they have taken him first of all to what they call a 'lock-up house,' where I 'll go and see if he wants me to take any letters for him. So good bye, dear Sally. Do now, give me your hand, there 's a dear. Ah! you don't know how I love you!"

"Well, *you may* be sure I 'm not ungrateful, Thomas;" was *the reply, as the blushing* Sally withdrew her hand from the fond *grasp of her lover*, and hurried from the spot.

On approaching the door of my mother's chamber, she heard the voice of Mrs. Hannah, the upper housemaid, in that quarter. The circumstance was so unusual, for Mrs. Hannah was known, all through the house, to bear no good-will to the secretary or his wife, that Sally instantly guessed that her present visit was to convey the evil intelligence of the husband's arrest to his poor wife. Yet she felt almost angry with herself for the suspicion, and thought, "No, bad and ill-natured as Hannah is, she wouldn't have the heart to do that, neither."

Her fears, however, were confirmed, when the door opening to admit the retreat of the sour-tempered Mrs. Hannah, she heard her say, "Yes, Ma'am, a prison is a very dreadful place, indeed. Not as I knows from hexperence, for, God be thanked, neither I nor any one belonging to me was ever in one, but I 've been told, that the poor prisoners are all locked up in dark cells with iron bars, and handcuffed, and chained to the wall, and fed on black bread and musty water. Yes, a prison is a dreadful place; and then, being ever after called a gaol-bird by every one as knows a man was there! But, lud, Ma'am, how mighty pale you look! Mayhap you 'd like to take a little somewhat?"

"No, thank you, I shall be better by-and-bye," was the answer, uttered in so tremulous a tone, that Sally felt convinced there were tears in the eyes of the speaker.

"I 've just been to Mrs. Stratford," said Mrs. Hannah, when she perceived Sally. "I dare say you wanted to have the first story, but she is so proud and distant-like, that I determined, the moment I heard that her husband was marched off to gaol, to give her the news, just to show her that, for all her airs and conceit, we servants are above her and her husband, in not being taken off to prison. Would you believe it, Sally? she never asked a question; only trembled like an aspen leaf, turned as pale as death, and I thought was going to faint. But not a bit of it. She seemed, after a great struggle, to recover herself in a minute or two, and *looked so anxious* to be left alone, that, seeing nothing was to be *got out of her*, I came away."

"*Oh, Mrs. Hannah!* how could you have the heart to tell it to

her, all of a sudden, without taking time to break it to her by degrees?"

"Stuff, nonsense; the sooner people know things that concern them, the better; and as she has always been so high and mighty-like with me, whenever I wished to have a bit of chat with her, I was not sorry to have an opportunity of paying her off."

Always respectful towards my mother never did Sally feel so profound a deference towards her as at present. Uneducated as she was, there was a natural goodness and delicacy in her mind, that well supplied the place of culture and acquired refinement, and made her so conscious of the sacredness of grief, that she was under the influence of considerable emotion when, after allowing some time to elapse after Hannah had disappeared, she timidly knocked at the door of my mother's chamber.

"I beg pardon, Ma'am, but I thought I might be useful. Will you please to let me nurse the dear baby a bit?"

The tears, restrained in the presence of Hannah, had plenteously flowed after her departure, and my mother's pale face was covered with them. She silently placed me in Sally's arms, and turned away to conceal that she was weeping.

"I hope you 'll pardon me, Ma'am, but, indeed, you must try and not take on so. Things may not be so bad as you fear. Mr. Stratford is *not* gone to prison yet, and I trust in God won't be sent there. He has only been taken to the sheriff's officer's house, until matters are settled."

"Are you sure of this, my good Sally?"

"Quite sure, Ma'am, and Thomas has gone there in order to make himself useful by taking any letters that Mr. Stratford might wish to send."

"How kind and thoughtful," observed Mrs. Stratford.

"And no more than Mr. Stratford deserves, from every one," said Sally, "for he 's all goodness and kindness himself."

This simple, but well merited commendation, touched the heart of the fond wife, and again brought the tears to her eyes; *but she pressed the hand* of Sally, and thanked her with a glance *more eloquent than* words.

"You 'll see, Ma'am, we 'll soon have him back here, please

God; for as soon as ever my lord hears of what has happened, he'll get him out."

This hope was, however, much less strong in the breast of my mother than in that of Sally; for she had seen enough of Lord Willamere's recklessness with regard to money matters, to dread that his finances might not be in a state to enable him to liberate her husband.

Sally danced me in her arms, addressed the most endearing epithets to me, and succeeded in bringing smiles to my poor little face.

"See, Ma'am," said the kind-hearted girl, "how little missy laughs and coos. Isn't she a sweet little darling? and so good! It 's quite a pleasure to nurse her, and I wish you 'd let me have the care of her oftener. I dote on pretty children, and never am so happy as when nursing 'em; and this sweet baby is so good, that it's quite a treat to be allowed to have her."

When was a mother's breast insensible to a compliment addressed to her first-born? Even in the midst of her affliction, mine felt a pleasure in Sally's well-timed praises of hers, and the good girl was rewarded for her efforts to please, by seeing that they were not wholly unsuccessful.

"If you could, without neglecting your duty, take charge of my child," said my mother, "I would go to the place where my husband is."

"Pray don't think of it, Ma'am, 't would only vex and grieve Mr. Stratford to see you in such a place. Thomas will soon be back, and bring you a letter, you may be sure; for, only think, Ma'am, if Mr. Stratford did not write a note to you before he was taken off, or send to see you, it could only be because he did not wish you to appear before the sheriff's officer, or to tell you of his trouble until it was over. And you wouldn't have known anything of it, Ma'am, only for Hannah's being so busy and meddling as to come and tell you. I wish she had let it alone, and so spared you a couple or three hours' uneasiness. But some people have so little feeling, that they don't know how to behave to those that have."

Hour after hour passed, each fraught with indescribable

anxiety and dismay to the distressed wife, before Thomas made his appearance; and the intelligence he brought was but little calculated to remove her fears. He had taken notes from the secretary to Lord Willamere to the House of Lords, and also to his lordship's solicitor, Mr. Spellerman; but as neither had attended to the summons they contained, Mr. Stratford had been, after a fruitless delay of some four or five hours, removed to prison.

"I know Mr. Spellerman *was* at home," said Thomas, as he related the particulars of his errand to Sally; "his servant told me he had a party to dinner, and could not be disturbed, so had desired to be denied to every one. I assure you, my dear Sally, it grieved me to the heart, ay, and angered me too, when I saw the rooms all lighted up at his house, and smelt the rich dainties preparing in the kitchen, and saw the various wines, and fine plate on the side-board, while poor Mr. Stratford, who worked early and late for the benefit of my lord, and who has, as you and I know, hardly enough to keep body and soul together, was taken from his wife, and was left fretting through the long hours, in a dark, dingy, lock-up house, with no friend to comfort him, and indebted to a poor servant like myself, for a good office."

"Ah! Thomas, it was enough to pain you. But you know that when Mr. Spellerman asked his friends to dinner, he couldn't know that his presence would be required elsewhere; and he couldn't well leave 'em."

"But, couldn't he give me a line to take to one of his clerks, I should like to know? telling him to go and get poor Mr. Stratford liberated."

"So he ought, Thomas; but I suppose, and more 's the pity, it never entered his head."

"Or mayhap, which is more likely, Sally, he had no wish to interpose in the business. 'T was lucky I had the thought to take in my pocket the three pounds I had ready to put into the Saving Bank, for, just as I expected, poor Mr. Stratford had not a shilling about him. That screw, Bermingham, had his last sovereign out of him this morning; and in a lock-up house, many a demand is made for money. Oh, Lord! the imposition I saw going on there

is not to be imagined. I forced the poor gentleman to take the three pounds, and a difficult job I had to do so."

"God bless you, dear Thomas," said Sally with moistened eyes, and laying her hand fondly on his; "I never loved you so well as at this moment. I, too, have my little earnings in my box, and they shall all go to help Mr. Stratford."

"Well, Sally, if you love me better for it, 't will be some consolation for knowing that what I gave away will keep us some months longer from being married; and this thought, I'll own the truth, worried me all the way coming home; yet, believe me, for all that, I'd give it over again, Sally, rather than see the good gentleman in distress."

"Bless you for that, Thomas, bless you!" and Sally vouchsafed a kiss to her sweetheart, a rare and duly appreciated favour; and they separated: she, to deliver a note of which Thomas had been the bearer, from my father to my mother; and Thomas, to excuse his long absence to the *Maître d' Hôtel,* no easy matter, for that person, although by no means over attentive to his own duties, was little disposed to overlook the slightest negligence on the parts of others with regard to theirs. When Sally had ascended the back stairs to go to my mother, she heard the footsteps of her master mounting the front staircase on the same errand. She, therefore, retired to her own room, to wait until he had withdrawn from my mother's, and left her door ajar that she might hear him depart. He had been almost half an hour in the room, when Sally heard my mother's voice, in a more elevated tone than she had ever previously known that lady to use it, command him to withdraw. "Unhand me instantly, unhand me! my lord," exclaimed my mother; "you insult me, and degrade yourself."

Sally trembled, but, nevertheless, approached the door to be ready to come to my mother's aid if required.

"Pardon me, loveliest, most beloved of women. On my knees I implore you to forgive a moment of madness, caused by the intoxicating effect of your resistless charms. I have long and *passionately* loved you. In vain have I struggled to subdue my *unhappy* passion, and to chase your beauteous image from my *breast.*"

"Rise, my lord; every word you utter is an insult; and, oh! merciful powers! what a moment have you chosen to wound, to outrage me!" And here a burst of tears checked my mother's utterance.

"Only hear me. Promise that you will pardon my rash attempt to compel you to listen to my vows of eternal affection; promise that you will not shun my sight, and I will submit to be your slave, to have no will but yours, no object in life but to please you and study your wishes. My life, my fortune, all — I lay at your feet. Stratford shall be instantly released, and I will procure for him a lucrative appointment, if you will promise to be less cruel, less scornful."

"Never, never!" exclaimed my mother, "Sooner would I submit to the worst ills that Poverty can inflict, than owe to him, who would dishonour the man who has faithfully served and implicitly trusted him, a single favour. Leave the room, my lord, or permit me to do so."

"Only say that you will not leave the house, that you will not betray my folly, my madness, and I will leave you. Nay, more; I swear I will never again enter your presence without your permission."

"Every moment that sees you here, adds to the insult you have already offered to me. I will enter into no terms, make no promises, and I insist on being left alone."

"You shall be obeyed, loveliest, but haughtiest of your sex. Such is your power over me, that I yield obedience to your commands even when you bid me leave you, the most difficult of all;" and Lord Willamere, bowing lowly, quitted the room, leaving my mother overpowered by feelings of insulted virtue and indignation.

A short note from Lord Willamere, expressing his regret that he could not procure money to liberate him, was the only tidings that reached my poor father at the house of the sheriff's officer; and even for this note he was indebted to the indefatigable activity of the good-natured Thomas, who had induced the door-keeper of the House of Lords to take the one confided to him by my father to his lord, — the former note had not reached Lord Willamere

From Mr. Spellerman, not even a note could be obtained, that gentleman persisting in refusing to acknowledge his being in town, although his servant had admitted the fact. The sheriff's officer, well experienced in similar cases, was not slow in discovering that his prisoner was not likely to prove a profitable one. His inability, whether real or pretended, to pay the fare for the carriage that conveyed them to Searl Street, impressed him with a conviction of this truth; and he lost as little time as possible in communicating it to his *fidus Achates*, the master of the house, whose interests it materially concerned.

"There 's not much to be made of this 'ere chap, I can tell you," said Mr. Moses.

"Sorry to hear it," replied Mr. Isaacs; "he 's either as close-fisted a feller as ever I comed across, or else he 's a pauper; and in either case, he 'll bring no grist to your mill, I 'm a thinking. Some of these 'ere chaps keep such a fast hold on their money, that there 's no lugging a shilling out of 'em, and, mayhap, this one is of that sort."

"I don't much think it," said Mr. Moses, shaking his head, "for he 's comed out of a house where there 's a terrible scarcity of money. Why, that there Lord Willamere never pays no one, until he 's forced; his name 's as well known for that, as Rothschild's is for the contrary."

"Yes, that 's true enough; but don't you know that, often when a master is hard up, those as have the management of his money matters, are well to do in the world, and make their fortunes by him?"

"No doubt, it 's often the case, but, somehow or other, I don't think it is so with this 'ere feller."

"Well, time will tell, but I have my doubts that he 's not so poor as he pretends, and I 'll tell you my reasons. Mr. Solomons, as cute a chap as I knows anywhere, told me, that of all the customers he ever had, this one was the hardest about beating *down interest* and trying to get money on easy terms. It was this *very beating* down of interest as made Solomons discount the *bills*, *for*, says he to himself, 'If they didn't mean to pay, and *didn't know* they would have the wherewithal, they'd never be so

sharp about beating down the interest; for, those as knows they *can't* pay, makes no bother about what they promises to pay.' And, says Solomons to himself, 'This Mr. Stratford must have money, for he seems to understand the value of it so well, which I 've remarked, those as have the most of it always do. Would Mr. Stratford take such pains and trouble to beat me down about the interest, if it was only for his employer's sake? No, no, he has a personal motive in it, I 'm sure, and as Lord Willamere is such an extravagant and thoughtless man, this 'ere chap must have had plenty of hopportunities of making money."

"Somehow or other, I think this chap too great a spooney to have profited by such chances. Why, Lord love you, Mr. Isaacs, there 's some men such perfect fools, that they 're not up to anything. This man turned so white in the face, and his lips trembled so when I nabbed him, that I made certain he had not the wherewithal to get his release, nor no great hopes of having any friend to come forward."

Soon after this conversation between Messrs. Moses and Isaacs, Thomas made his appearance, and, with much difficulty, induced my poor father to accept the loan of three pounds, after which, he took the notes, as previously stated, to his lord, and to Mr. Spellerman.

Anxious to ascertain the precise state of the prisoner's finances, Mr. Isaacs entered the room, and inquired, with some show of urbanity whether he would not be pleased to take some refreshment.

"Nothing thank you," was the reply.

"You can have anything you like here, Sir, from turtle soup down to mutton broth, and from any French *entrée* you choose to ask for, down to a plain mutton chop or beefsteak."

"I require nothing at present," said my father.

"It 's growing dusk, so I suppose you 'd like candles?"

"Yes," was the reply, and forthwith a pair of wax lights, were placed on the table. My father with the rigid system of economy he was in the habit of practising, immediately extinguished *one of the candles, which* produced a contemptuous smile from *Mr. Isaacs, as he mentally* promised, that his prisoner should pay, *ay and at triple cost too*, for both of them.

"I wonder," said he to himself, "how he thinks we as keep houses for the accommodation of such as him, are to live?"

"Have you any friend you 'd like to send for, Sir?" inquired he.

"I have already sent to two;" was the answer.

"And who took the messages or notes?"

"Lord Willamere's servant who came here."

"Then, Sir, I must tell you, that it 's against the regulations of this house, that any one but my people, or Mr. Moses's, should go of errands for prisoners. I keep men purposely for it, which I must pay, and how am I to be able to do so, if I 'm defrauded out of my regular profits?"

My father's face became flushed with indignation, when he heard the term defrauded, addressed to himself. He, however, so far mastered his feelings as to say, that he was ignorant that he was transgressing the rules of the house, when he employed Lord Willamere's servant.

"You 'll have to pay just the same, Sir, that 's all, for as my men were in attendance, and ready to go on your errands, their time must be paid for."

"Very well," answered my father; and he was once more left to his solitude.

CHAPTER VII.

How tediously did the time pass on with my father, in this wretched chamber! — his mind a prey to anxiety, as he dwelt with bitterness on the state of his poor wife, should he, as he now began to fear would be the case, be compelled to leave this place of temporary confinement for a prison. Oh! why had he involved her fate in his more wretched one? And their poor child too! Often did he press his icy hands to his burning temples, to cool the fever raging there, and endeavour to think upon some resource, or some well-disposed acquaintance who might be induced to extricate him. He passed over in review all the persons he knew in London, but, alas! as they were chiefly, if not entirely composed of the tradespeople of Lord Willamere, to whom large sums were

long due, the retrospection brought him little comfort. One, however, among the number, he recollected had always manifested more patience and civility than the others. This was the grocer, Mr. Manvers, whose character for integrity he had ever found justified by the correctness of his accounts and moderation of his charges. He would send for Mr. Manvers, relate his position to him, and perhaps he might be induced to come to his aid in this dilemma. But, then, Pride interposed, to check the latent hope suggested by this expedient. How was he to solicit so great a favour from one on whose kindness he had no claim? How reveal to him, a comparative stranger, the affairs of Lord Willamere, the entanglement of which had led to the bill transactions, and finally to his own imprisonment? Was he, who had borne poverty, and all the privations it entails, uncomplainingly, to now become a suitor to a person of whom he knew little, and who knew even less of him? Oh! there was pain and humiliation in the very thought, and he abandoned it almost as soon as it had been formed. But then again came the recollection of his Emily and their child. What was to become of *them*, when he should become the inmate of a prison? Was he not selfish, in giving way to the dictates of his own pride, when his adored wife's peace of mind was in question? Yes, he would vanquish his scruples, stifle the sense of delicacy that made him shrink from soliciting the aid of Mr. Manvers, and at once write to him to request his presence.

"To what vexation, what humiliation would I not submit, to be enabled to return home to my poor Emily, before she learns the cause of my long and unusual absence!" exclaimed my father.

He wrote to Mr. Manvers, and Mr. Isaacs, having despatched the note, again proffered refreshments to his prisoner.

"You 'll surely not refuse to order a bottle of wine, Sir?" said that individual, on profitable, if not hospitable thoughts intent.

"I prefer a little tea," was the answer: and Mr. Isaacs withdrew, *evidently ill-pleased* at the result of his offer.

After a few minutes had elapsed, Mr. Moses made his appearance.

"As you seem unacquainted with the rules of houses like this, Sir, I must just tell you, that it 's the custom for all gentlemen as stop here to call for something, even if they don't want it, for the good of the house. That 's how people like Mr. Isaacs live, and are able to pay rent and taxes; and if it suits gentlemen's convenience to remain here a few hours, just to see what their friends will do for 'em, or to try if *indeed* they *have any* friends, for this is the place to find that out, they ought to remember to behave genteelly, and do what 's expected of 'em."

"I did not know the regulations," answered my father, with a deep sigh, "and as I felt unequal to touching any refreshments, I did not think it necessary to order any."

"Very likely, Sir, but you need not take any if you don't like it. This is Liberty Hall in that respect, for all it 's a lock-up house, but every one as comes here must order something for the good of the house. In like manner *I* must be paid for allowing you to stay here, when I could have taken you off straight to prison at once. I just mention these things because I see you are not used to our business. But you 'll become so in the course of time, I dare say, and then you 'll want no one to instruct you."

"I have ordered some tea," observed Mr. Stratford.

"Lord love you, Sir! that goes for nothing. Order a couple of bottles of wine. Mr. Isaacs and I will empty one to your health, and the other will go to Mrs. Isaac's cupboard. 'Live and let live,' that 's my motto; and I don't think any one can object to it."

Before the poor secretary could assent or dissent to the proverb, uttered with much self-complacency by Mr. Moses, the messenger returned from Mr. Manvers, saying that an answer would be sent. My father's faint hope of assistance from that quarter instantly faded, and it was not until it had vanished, that he became sensible, by the pang of disappointment, that he had counted on it. "Ay, ay, I see how it is," said Mr. Moses, "the old story! Won't come. 'An answer will be sent,' means precisely, *that no more notice will be taken of the request. It 's astonishing how tender-hearted people's friends become, when they hear men are shut up in a prison. They can't bear to see a friend in distress.*

I suppose, so never come near 'em. It 's a pity, Sir, you went to the expense of sending a messenger for nothing. A pretty sum 't will come to, too; for Jem must have half killed the cab-horse, to have got there and back in so short a time!"

"I 'll trouble you for the fare of the cab, and the payment of my messenger," said Mr. Isaacs, entering the room: "Short reckonings make long friends, as the saying is, and it 's the rule of my house to have everything paid for when had."

"How much is the amount?" asked my father, putting his hand into his pocket.

"Seven shillings and sixpence for the cab, and five shillings for the messenger."

"And as your hand is in, Sir, 't will be just as well to pay me for the fly that we came in here. It 's but a trifle — seven and sixpence; so a sovereign will clear both the little accounts," observed Mr. Moses.

The sovereign was abstracted from the pocket of Mr. Stratford, and handed over to the claim ants, who left the room to divide it between them.

"I say, Moses, did you see, we got him to fork out at last," said Mr. Isaacs, "for all you thought he had no money."

"He 's no better than he should be, you may be sure," was the reply; "for he positively pretended to have no cash, when I asked him for some to pay the cab when we arrived. A regular screw, and deserves to be worked. I can't abide such fellows — wanting to do us out of our profits. They ought to be ashamed of themselves, but they have no shame in 'em."

"It 's no use letting him remain here, you may take my word for it; the house will gain nothing by such a skin-flint, and no one will come to release him. You see the man he sent for wouldn't come, nor the lawyer that the servant went for."

"I 'm quite of your opinion, and will march him off, but let us first get a couple of bottles of wine out of him. I told him 't was the custom here, so he 's prepared for it."

"If I thought he had another sovereign or two left, I' d send up *the wine, but I didn't hear* the jingle of any more coin in his pocket *when he drew out the* one we 've got."

"Let us take our chance. I 'm rather thirsty, and two or thre glasses of wine will do me good; and it 's my opinion that there ' a few more sovereigns where this one came from."

"Very well, I 'll send up the wine, so that he can't say that I was not served to him."

"No, no, it 's all fair and above board here, Mr. Isaacs."

Contrary to the expectations of Messrs. Isaacs and Moses, and indeed of my father himself, Mr. Manvers, the grocer, in due time made his appearance at Searl Street. He was a grave man and on this occasion looked even more so than usual. He listened with an unchanged aspect to the statement of the secretary. He however, shook his head when the bill transactions were explained, and opened his eyes in astonishment when informed that no portion of the money raised had ever entered the purse of Stratford.

"Lord Willamere will not, surely, leave you here to suffer for his debts?" demanded Mr. Manvers.

"His lordship would not, I am convinced, had he the means, this moment, of releasing me."

"But ought he, can he, as an honest man, let you be imprisoned on his account, — if he has plate, horses, carriages, furniture, any of those things which even persons much beneath his lordship in station are not without?"

My father was silent, for he did not think himself justified in disclosing to any one the fact, that all the personal and household property of Lord Willamere had long been assigned over to a friendly creditor, in order to preserve them from those less amicably disposed. Careless and culpably negligent as Lord Willamere had been towards him, my father possessed so good a heart and was so guileless, and unskilled in worldly lore, that he judged the blamable conduct of Lord Willamere, much more leniently that it deserved, and shrank from revealing aught that could militate against either his character or his pecuniary interests While he paused, embarrassed what reply to make, Mr. Manvers looked still more gravely than before, and his countenance *assumed an* expression of austerity, that left little hope in the

mind of the poor secretary that he had anything to expect from him.

"You have not answered my question, Mr. Stratford, and your silence, I confess, appears incomprehensible to me. If Lord Willamere suffers you to be imprisoned for his debts, he being, as a peer, protected from arrest, then I must pronounce his conduct anything but what might be expected from a nobleman or gentleman, and your forbearance towards him surprises me. I have another question to ask you, Mr. Stratford. Do you think the house of Lord Willamere, a professed libertine, as his lordship is accused of being, a proper abode for your young and handsome wife, when you can no longer be there to protect her?"

"I have no friends, no means to provide her a home, however humble," said my father; his lips tremulous with emotion. "If I had, never should she have entered that house."

"Perhaps it would have been better for both your sakes that she never had," observed Mr. Manvers gravely.

My father looked at him inquiringly, and then said, "Why, why would it have been better? I know that it would have been infinitely better for her, that we had not married: it needs no one to remind me of that; for one of the heaviest reproaches I have to make myself, was the having urged her to leave a home where she was esteemed, respected, and knew no privations, to share my lot, the hardships of which I ought to have too well known to have exposed her to them."

"I did not mean to reproach you with your marriage, although it must be admitted it was an imprudent one, situated as you were."

"Why then did you say it would have been as well that my wife had never entered Lord Willamere's house?"

"I hardly know, Mr. Stratford, whether I am justified in entering on so very delicate a subject; yet, as I made the reflection you have repeated, perhaps, I ought to state the reason. You are not probably aware of the evil rumours circulated against your honour, and the purity of your wife, in consequence of her

having taken up her abode beneath the roof of Lord Willamere?"

"Merciful God, is it so?" exclaimed my father, turning pale as death. "Oh! my poor Emily! my poor Emily!" and he sank into a chair. His agony, too deep to leave a doubt, even on the most suspicious mind, that it was feigned, secretly touched the feelings of Mr. Manvers, an upright, honourable man, who could sympathize with the pain he had unconsciously inflicted.

"Was it not enough to entail poverty on her, but must I also have exposed her fair fame, dearer to me than life itself, to calumny? Oh! Mr. Manvers, if you knew her, you would, like me, be convinced of her purity, of her irreproachable conduct! And is this then the reward of a conjugal devotion, seldom equalled, never exceeded, — of a resignation under privation rarely borne with such fortitude even by man? O! this, is the most bitter of all my trials, the one which most unmans me."

And my poor father gave way to the emotion, he could no longer control; all the griefs pent up in his heart for long months, seemed now to overflow the boundaries in which they had hitherto been confined, and his agitated frame shook in the vain struggle to subdue them.

"How has this man been wronged!" thought Mr. Manvers; "I wish I had not revealed to him the evil rumours that had reached me."

"I feel hardly less indignant at the injury offered to Lord Willamere, by those base and unfounded slanders, than at that aimed at my wife, and my own character," said my father. "He is incapable of harbouring even a dishonourable thought towards me or mine, and would, I am sure, be the first to resent such a charge. But tell me, I entreat you, Mr. Manvers, what you really did hear? To refute slander, one should be made aware of its extent; and though it will be indeed a most painful thing for me to listen to reports so humiliating, so wounding to my feelings; nevertheless, I must request you to be explicit with me."

And, although pale as marble, my father, by a violent effort *of self-control*, resumed a more calm and composed aspect.

"*I wish* you would not call on me to inflict this pain on you.

and on myself also," replied Mr. Manvers; "for I assure you, I am now so fully convinced of the utter falsehood of the rumours I had heard, that it will be very painful for me to repeat them. Spare me the disagreeable task, and as an amend for the chagrin I have already caused you, and at a moment too, when you had so much cause for annoyance on other grounds, allow me to tell you, that if I can be of use to you in your present dilemma, it will really give me satisfaction to do so."

"Thanks, thanks! I feel your kindness as I ought, but you must let me know the worst."

"Well then — but really I hardly can bring myself to utter what must inflict pain, knowing, as I now do, the utter falsehood of the reports."

"Pray let me hear them at once.

"You were represented as one of those convenient husbands who submit to their own dishonour. Men who, instead of being the guardians of the purity of their wives, expose them to temptation, and profit by the result."

My father groaned aloud and shuddered, and Mr. Manvers again begged to be excused entering into further particulars.

"Proceed, I pray you to proceed," exclaimed the agitated man.

"A lucrative place was, it has been stated, to be the reward of your in — —." Infamy, he would have said, but he checked himself at the first syllable.

"Oh God! Oh God!" muttered my father.

"These evil rumours were chiefly circulated by servants, who had heard them from their masters, some of whom had seen you and your wife at the table of Lord Willamere, and marked the more than ordinary interest his lordship appeared to take in the lady. Her beauty, and residence in Lord Willamere's house, added to his well-known libertinism, offered sufficient grounds for slander; and when the reports in question proceeded from his lordship's friends and companions, you can hardly wonder that they received *credence*. If gentlemen knew the injury they inflict *by their unrestrained* conversations, and comments in the *presence of servants waiting* on them at table, they would be less apt

to indulge in them. All the rumours that float about I and find their way at last into the slanderous newspapers, traced to this source. A few coarse jokes, or the banter often carried on between libertines, have frequently led to of reputation of women, whose only faults were a levit nating in high spirits, and indulged in, through want of ledge of the world."

"And this terrible slander obtained belief?"

"I regret to say it did. Few persons take the troubl quiring into the truth or falsehood of evil reports. It is that a semblance of probability exists, to gain them gene dence, and the slandered are often the last to hear of them

My father felt as if the brand of dishonour had fixed a lible mark on his brow. At one moment, the burning l shame mounted to his very temples, and the next, a cold s passed over his frame.

The entrance of Mr. Moses interrupted further conve and was explained by that person informing the prisoner, could no longer remain in Searl Street — "I have let y here longer than I ought," said Mr. Moses; "but now y be off."

At this moment the voice of Mr. Isaacs was heard in loud expostulation on the stairs. "It 's no use, Ma'am up to disturb the prisoner now, for he 's just going to be t to gaol."

"I *will*, I *must* see him," said a voice, which even half-choked by emotion, still retained an unusual sweet "Good God! it is my wife," exclaimed my father, rushir door to meet her, forgetful for the moment that it was lock her tremulous tones of entreaties still reaching his ear. — ring, Sir," said Mr. Manvers; and pulling the bell-rope rep Mr. Isaacs made his appearance. "Be so good as to all Stratford to come up to her husband: — or stay, I will conduct her myself." And so saying, Mr. Manvers left t and went to her.

"I didn't know, Sir, whether you might wish to see or not."

"Not wish to see my wife?" exclaimed my father, greatly agitated.

"Why, for the matter of that, Sir, I couldn't be sure that she was your wife." Here my father looked so fiercely at him, that he changed his tone. "I beg pardon, Sir," resumed he; "what I meant was, that so many ladies come here after gentlemen when they are arrested, and always say they are their wives, that I sometimes don't know what to think; and often the gentlemen would rather *not* see 'em, and scold me for letting 'em in, they cry, and take on so."

He had hardly finished this speech, when the agitated, tearful wife entered, and was pressed in the arms of her husband. The meeting was a very touching one; and Mr. Manvers, having made a sign to Mr. Isaacs to withdraw, was on the point of following him, when my father requested him to remain. "I almost wish you had not come here, my poor Emily," said he; "this is no place for you."

"My place is near you, wherever you may be, dearest," replied his wife, clinging with trembling eagerness to his arm, as if to seek protection — "you must bear up against this trial, my beloved."

"With you I can bear any trial, but do not let us again be separated. Let me share your prison, it will be happiness, compared with the wretchedness of being parted from you. I have brought our child, and a few things for present use. She is below with Sally, who accompanied me here. I left Willamere House, never more to enter it. Oh! Henry, you know not, you cannot know, what I have suffered since you left me;" and here a passionate burst of tears impeded my mother's utterance.

"Speak, dearest Emily! say what has occurred. I implore you to tell me."

My mother cast a timid glance at Mr. Manvers, as if to indicate to her husband, that what she had to communicate was not fit for a stranger's ear; but he, understanding that appealing look, told her that Mr. Manvers was his friend, his only one in the present hour of trial, and begged her to have no reserve on account of his presence.

"Oh! Henry, how have you been deceived by the selfish unfeeling man, in whom you have trusted! Could you have imagined that Lord Willamere, emboldened by your absence, and forgetful of all decency or pity for my distress, dared to insult me by an avowal of his passion!"

My father started from his seat as if an adder had stung him; his very brow became crimsoned with indignation and shame, and he shook with emotion. "The villain, the villain!" exclaimed he, "and it is for this man; — but no, I will not profane the name of man by so calling him; — it is for this vile, this heartless wretch, that I am now a prisoner; that I have for months and years suffered privations and humiliations without end, while unceasingly toiling in his service, too conscious of his pecuniary embarrassments to remind him of my own. Oh! Emily, can you forgive me, for having exposed you to such insult?" And here my poor father's utterance was checked by the violence of his feelings.

His wife forgot her own grief in pity for his, and soothed him with a tenderness that melted the heart of Manvers, who now, perfectly convinced of the utter falsehood of the tales circulated against this poor but excellent couple, determined to assist them to the utmost of his power. He arranged with Messrs. Isaacs and Moses, that their prisoner should remain where he was for the night, that accommodation should be found for his wife and child; and having seen a repast which he had ordered served to them, he bade them farewell for the night, promising to be with them early next morning.

CHAPTER VIII.

True love! the most unselfish of all the passions, — thou that canst make thy votaries forget self in anxiety for another, and that canst only lead them to unhappiness through the object beloved. — O! what like thee, can refine and purify the heart!

Each occupied only by thought for the other, my father and *mother* endeavoured to assume the appearance of a calmness that *was, alas!* foreign to the minds of both. What the morrow might

bring, neither dared to reflect on. A prison, in all its dreariness, arose in the gloomy vistas which their imaginations pictured, and a dread of separation, the last—worst ill of all that menaced them, haunted their thoughts. Yet, notwithstanding these dismal forebodings, each tried to cheat the other by the semblance of composure, while their hearts were a prey to anxiety and depression. The baseness of one whom he had regarded and confided in, overpowered the firmness of my father. In whom henceforth was he to trust, when Lord Willamere, whom he had so faithfully, so devotedly served, had betrayed and wounded him in the most tender point? When he looked on the pale but beautiful face of his wife, on which care had already left its traces, but where purity and innocence had set their seal, he wondered, that even the most reckless libertine should have dared to entertain for such a being aught approaching to an unholy feeling. Was she, in her calm and almost angelic beauty, a fit object for the sensual desires and grovelling appetites of a libertine? O! no. It was sacrilege so to regard her, and accursed be he who had presumed to insult her chaste ears with vows of lawless passion, or to view her in any other light than that of a model for wives and mothers. And this was the woman with whose fair fame the tongues of sinful men had been busy. There was torture, there was madness in the thought; and as he looked on that mild and lovely face, beaming with tenderness on her slumbering infant, and turning from it to him with glances full of pitying affection, he felt that debased, and corrupted indeed, must those be, who could, after having once seen her, harbour, even for a moment, a single suspicion to her disadvantage.

Poor man, ignorant of the world, and of the vice of those who form a considerable portion of its denizens, he was prone to judge others by himself. As soon could he have suspected the chastity of an angel as that of the lovely creature before him; and he could have wept in very tenderness, as a fond mother would over an innocent and wronged daughter, as he remembered that his Emily *had been traduced and insulted.* But not always were his feelings *so calm. At moments*, an unconquerable rage would fill his *mind; and had the vile libertine*, who had dared to breathe his

passionate vows to his wife's ear, or the base aspersors of her fame and his honour, stood before him, he would have perilled his life to avenge the wrong. Never previously had his breast been shook by such a whirlwind of contending passions. Anger, love, and pity strove by turns for mastery; but jealousy, "the green-eyed monster," that tortures less pure breasts, found no entrance in his honest and confiding one. He knew that his honour was as safe in the keeping of his Emily as in his own; and that the mind of his slumbering child was not more free from earthly stain or sin than was hers. Never, if he could guard against it, should her ear be shocked by hearing that her virtue had been questioned — that she had been regarded as the paramour of Lord Willamere! He felt that he would prefer death to her learning this terrible tale, for he wished that her pure mind should never be sullied by a knowledge that such wickedness could be, and, above all, be directed to her. And he too, how had his character, — that by which he lived, by which he hoped to gain an honourable maintenance for his wife and child — been assailed. O God! that *he* should have lived to be pointed at by the finger of scorn, as that vilest of all wretches that shame manhood, a husband conniving at his own dishonour!

While these torturing reflections passed through his mind, his wife marked their effect on his changeful countenance, and, approaching him, gently pressed her fair and delicate hand on his fevered brow.

"Do not give way to painful thoughts, dearest," said she, in the low and sweet accents that ever soothed and charmed his ear. "A prison is not always, I am prone to hope, so cheerless an abode as it is represented. Heaven be praised, I have a right to be with you, even there, and never did I bless this privilege more than now. I can make pretty drawings, and various ingenious little things, which, through the medium of Mr. Manvers, who seems so kindly disposed towards us, may find a sale. We have been accustomed to privations, and, God be thanked! have *learned to bear* them, and I trust that by our joint exertions we *can earn sufficient* to supply our wants."

"*Bless* you, my sweet Emily! always my soother and com-

forter under every trial," replied the fond husband, as he removed the hand from his temples and pressed it to his lips. "Yes, even a prison cheered by your presence will be to me preferable, oh! how far preferable, than a palace would be without, could I but forget that it was my selfishness that has led you there."

"How you torment yourself, dearest! You ought long ere this to have known how warmly my heart pleaded your suit for our marriage, and that aught like regret for that which I must ever consider the happiest event of my whole life, sounds like a reproach to me for having encumbered you with a wife and child."

"Blessed, blessed ties, that bind me to an existence that without them would be, indeed a dreary, an insupportable one! Yes, even here, with so much to render me anxious for the present, and to alarm me for the future, I feel that I have a great deal to be thankful for, and that, while Heaven spares me you and our child, I ought not to despair."

In such communing, this poor, but loving pair passed the early part of the night, until slumber, that greatest of all blessings to the wretched, pressed their eye-lids, and for a few hours granted an oblivion of their cares.

When my father opened his eyes next morning, for a moment he felt as if in a dream, but the sight of the iron-barred windows, and the unclean room with its gaudy but faded finery, brought the reality to his mind. His wife and child still slept, and as the light from the shutterless window fell on their faces the calm beauty of both touched him almost to tears. The child smiled in its slumber — poor innocent! unconscious that even already care and poverty had laid their chilling grasp on its young life, and that, from its gentle sleep, it was to open its eyes in a prison; and the fair young mother in her slumber sighed forth the name of her husband, and pressed the pillow on which her head reclined, to her cheek, believing it to be his hand. Oh, Sleep! how calm, how holy art thou! How like thy sister, Death! Surely, if ever it be permitted to mortals to hold communion with heavenly spirits, it must be when resigned to thy benign influence. They are then more freed from worldly thoughts and sinful passions, and their very helplessness, like that of infants, places them more imme-

diately under the protection of their Father in Heaven. My father's troubled spirit became calm as he contemplated the two beloved beings in repose. They comprised his world, his only treasure. Were they no longer in existence, life would no more have a single charm, a single blessing for him. There lay his all — the only comfort, the sole drops of sweetness vouchsafed to his cup of bitterness; and yet, how were his cares for the present, and his dread for the future, rendered sharper by his anxiety for their well-being! He feared lest every noise might break their slumbers, now so sweet and calm, and that his poor Emily should awake sooner than he could wish, to behold the iron bars of their prison, and be reminded of the painful realities of their actual position.

"How many," thought my father, as he gazed, with almost woman's tenderness, on his wife and child, "less worthy, oh! how infinitely less worthy than my poor Emily, are at this moment pillowed on down, and surrounded by all the appliances of wealth and splendour, who will awake to enjoy luxuries, and to frame new and imaginary wants, certain of the means of procuring them, while this fair, this pure creature will awake to feel 'the stings and arrows' of our hard fortune, denied even a modest competency wherewith to minister to our humble desires! Oh, Fortune! well hast thou been accounted blind, when thou canst heap thy golden stores on the less worthy, and leave a being like this to pine in want. But let me not murmur. Thy ways, Almighty, are inscrutable, and, as Thou hast deemed it fit to steep me and mine in poverty, teach me to bear it with resignation. Teach me to remember, whenever misfortune presses most heavily upon me, that hundreds, nay, thousands, more worthy than I am, are exposed to similar, perhaps to greater trials, and to bow with submission to Thy will."

Those who have fought with fortune, and vainly resisted her strokes, will acknowledge that the angry spirit in which they have been received, greatly adds to the irritation of the wounds inflicted. But no sooner does resignation take the place of anger, than a mental relief is experienced; although the wounds are deep as before, they rankle less; and submission brings in time, heal-

ing on its wings. My mother at length awoke, but her first glance was not as her husband feared it would be, at the iron-barred window, but at him; and, oh! what unutterable love was in that look. The next glance was at her sleeping child, and then her eyes were lifted towards Heaven, in thanks for the possession of these blessings. How angelic did she appear, as with rapt devotion her lips moved in prayer, and, when ended, she pressed them to her husband's brow.

Mr. Manvers was announced before my father and mother had completed their matinal meal. His manner towards them was even more cordial than on the preceding evening, and he assured the former that he felt the utmost desire to be of use to him.

"To do this, it will be necessary for me to know your exact position, and the extent of the engagements into which you have entered," said the worthy man.

When informed of them, and the amount was much larger than he had anticipated, — he questioned my father as to the likelihood of Lord Willamere's ever paying those debts which, in truth, were his, and his only. The bare mention of that name, brought the flush of indignation to the cheek of the poor secretary, while he answered, that before he had learned the base attempt of his lordship to corrupt his wife, he would have considered a doubt on this subject as an injury and insult to him. "But now," added my father, "I can believe him capable of anything, and my conviction is, that he will leave me to suffer for my foolish and misplaced confidence in his honour."

"I hardly know what to advise, or what to do," observed Mr. Manvers. "Your responsibilities amount to a large, — a very large sum." But here a glance at the pale cheeks and tearful eyes of my mother, so touched the feelings of the kind-hearted man, that his pity for her almost conquered his prudence. Still, the sum required to free my father from the whole of his liabilities, was too serious a one to be lightly proffered. It was true, Mr. Manvers was a rich man, and had only two children to provide for; but to pay so much money for so worthless a person as Lord Willamere, was really vexatious. Yet, if he did not free my father, the poor man would be sent to prison, and the fair

young creature before him, and her child, would have to share his hard lot. What a foolish man Stratford must be to have involved himself in such a labyrinth of difficulties for any one, but more especially for so unworthy a person as Lord Willamere; — and a sentiment of anger against the poor secretary, entered his mind.

A thorough man of business, with habits of scrupulous exactitude in fulfilling his engagements, and consequently cautious in forming them, he could not make allowance for the utter want of prudence in my father, as revealed by the statement he had extracted from him, nor for his total ignorance and inexperience in matters of business. There was something of contempt mingled in the pity he entertained for him. But then followed the reflection, — and there was a certain portion of self-complacency in it, of the general deficiency of learned men — in a pecuniary knowledge of affairs, and of their vast inferiority in this respect to men of business like himself. He felt disposed to thank providence that *he* was not a scholar, lest he too might have been as ignorant of money matters as the poor ruined man before him: but this very self-complacency engendered kind sentiments towards my father. "I 'll tell you what, Sir," said he, "I 'll at once pay this bill of Mr. Solomon's, and, as no other detainer has been lodged against you, my doing so will secure your liberty. Let me settle with the harpies here, for be assured you are no match for them."

"I know not how to thank you, indeed I hardly think I ought to accept the service you so very kindly offer to render me, knowing, as I do, that I am not likely to have the means of repaying you."

But the eloquent glance of my mother spoke volumes to the good-natured Mr. Manvers, and he had seldom in his life experienced more self-satisfaction than at that moment, when assured that he had rendered so charming a woman, happy. He left the room, to arrange matters with Messrs. Moses and Isaacs; and, my mother threw herself into the arms of her husband, filled with gratitude to Heaven, for having in their hour of need, raised up *such a friend* to serve them. The thinness of the walls, and par-

titions of the ill-built house of Mr. Isaacs, enabled those in the rooms immediately above the ones occupied by the owner, to overhear all that passed in them, and my parents soon heard loud and angry voices in discussion.

"What! twenty shillings for two bottles of sherry?" exclaimed Mr. Manvers; "why, I keep as good wine as any merchant in London, and I never dreamt of charging any such price."

"That may be, Sir," replied Mr. Isaacs, sulkily. "You charge what you like, and I charge what pleases me. Your customers go to you through choice, and may go elsewhere if it suits them, mine come to me from necessity, can't help themselves and so I must charge accordingly."

"You don't mean to say that Mr. Stratford drank two bottles of wine last night, do you?"

"He might have drunk 'em, if it so pleased him to do, for they were served to him; but as he didn't that wasn't my fault, they must be paid for all the same. And what's more, I don't see why people should grumble about such trifles. 'Live and let live' is my motto; and I must say, that I never had a worse customer enter my house than this here friend of yours. Wouldn't have a bit of dinner served, nor order any thing, which he ought to have done, if only from a sense of common decency and for the good of the house."

The husband and wife looked at each other, as they listened to this new code of lock-up-house etiquette; and both mentally prayed that they might never again be subjected to its influence.

To those not accustomed to analyze human character and motives, it would have appeared a strange anomaly, to hear Mr. Manvers disputing every item of the gross imposition entered in Mr. Isaacs' account, while determined, with but a faint prospect of eventually being reimbursed, to pay the whole of the amount of the writ taken out against my father by the usurer Solomons, with all the legal expenses that had accumulated thereon. But to those acquainted with mankind, there was nothing strange in this mixture of parsimony and generosity, for they know that they continually meet in the same individuals; and that it is owing to

a strict observance of prudence and economy, that people are enabled to perform generous actions.

And now all accounts were settled, and the harpies of the lock-up-house paid, the next question was, where were the Stratfords to go? "Have you no friends who would receive you for a few days, until we could see what can be done?" demanded he; but the rapid and melancholy change in the countenances of both husband and wife gave a negative to the question, before their faltering lips could pronounce one; and the kind-hearted, but somewhat *brusque* Manvers sincerely regretted having asked one which, by reminding them of their friendless position, had evidently occasioned them so much pain. "How very stupid it was of me," resumed he, after a short pause, "to forget that I have a couple of spare rooms at my house where you will be very comfortable for the present, and where I can assure you of a very hearty welcome."

There was nothing left for my parents, but to accept the kind invitation; and, deeply impressed with a sense of the goodness of him who gave it, they entered the hackney-coach, which had been sent for by Mr. Manvers, and drove to his house. With a delicate regard to the feelings of his new guests, he led them into the house through the private door instead of through the shop, that they might not be exposed to the prying gaze of the shopmen or customers who filled it; and having conducted them up stairs into a neatly furnished sitting-room, with an excellent bed-room and dressing-room adjoining, he told them to consider themselves quite at home, and begged that they would share his repasts, naming the hours at which they were served.

"On hospitable thoughts intent," Mr. Manvers went to consult with his housekeeper, who also enacted the part of cook in his large but well-ordered establishment, on the necessity of making some addition to the family dinner. He always dined apart from his clerks, as he partook that meal with his two daughters, girls of ten and eleven years old, on whom he doted. "A gentleman *and his wife*, particular friends of mine," said Mr. Manvers, *anxious to impress* the precise Mrs. Manley with a respectful con*sideration for* his guests,—"have done me the favour to come and

spend some time with me, and I desire that every attention may be paid to their comfort while they remain."

"Certainly, Sir," was the reply.

"Have a couple of roast chickens added to dinner; and tell Betsey the housemaid to give all the time she can spare from her work to Mrs. Stratford's child."

"Two additional rooms to clean every day, Sir, will, I fear, not leave Betsey any time for the child; but I know a nice tidy young girl, Sir, a cousin of Betsey's, who is looking out for a place, and who would be very glad, for the sake of her meals, to come here and take charge of the child, and wait on the lady too while they stay, and she could sleep with Betsey."

"A capital plan, Mrs. Manley, send for her directly; but mind, Mrs. Stratford is not to know that this young person has been engaged on her account. Let it be supposed that she belongs to the house." And having satisfactorily made these arrangements, Mr. Manvers hurried off to his shop to superintend his business, well pleased with himself and others; while Mrs. Manley, having sent out for the chickens and for Betsey's cousin, donned her best cap, and a snowy muslin apron, and proceeded to pay her respects to the new visitors.

"I hope, Ma'am, that you won't scruple to ring the bell for anything you want," said the good woman, after having respectfully welcomed my father and mother. "Here, Ma'am, you 'll find plenty of nice books;" and she took the key of a large and weel-stored book-case from her pocket, and handed it to my mother. "I 'll send you up the morning papers immediately, Sir; and here you 'll find paper, pens, and ink," continued she, addressing my father, as she opened a neat mahogany writing-desk, which formed one of the pieces of furniture of the appartment. "Oh, the dear child! bless its little heart, what a pretty creature!" said Mrs. Manley, turning to the baby which its mother had laid on the sofa, and who, refreshed by its long sleep, was now smiling and stretching out its little rounded limbs in apparent comfort.

"*We have a handy,* active young person in the house, who *will be glad, Ma'am, to* take charge of little miss and to wait on

you, as my master ordered. She 'll be here in a few minutes; and, in the meanwhile, I 'll just step and make a little panada, for I 'm sure, by its yawning, that the little darling is hungry." And off went Mrs. Manley, leaving my parents much pleased with her, and thankful that the kindness of their host would not be thwarted by the ill-will of his confidential servant, as is too often the case in similar circumstances.

Ere half an hour had elapsed, the child had partaken of its panada, which was excellent, and was cooing and smiling as gaily, as if, to use a common phrase, "it had been born with the silver spoon in its mouth," which had so lately fed it: and its parents, thankful to Providence for their recent release from prison and present shelter, tried to be as happy as they were grateful.

CHAPTER IX.

GREAT was Lord Willamere's regret and dissatisfaction when he learned that my mother had left his house. Well knowing her poverty and dependent situation, he had not anticipated her taking this step, and, careless as he in general was with regard to the feelings of others, it is only rendering him justice to state, that, could he have recalled the event that had, as he imagined, led to it, gladly would he have done so. He felt, now, that it was too late to atone for the evil. What an error he had committed in alarming the virtue he had so long wished to undermine. How ill-timed was his rash declaration of love, at a moment when the position of her husband must have engrossed all my mother's thoughts, and excited, even more than usual, all her tenderness; and when *he*, with common tact, ought to have evinced even more than ordinary delicacy and respect in his conduct towards her! Yes; he had grossly committed himself; thrown up the game, as he termed it, when by skilfully playing his cards he might have won it, and, by having given way to the impulse of his mad passion, he had created fear and dislike, where he would have made *every sacrifice*, save that of his guilty affection, to have excited *regard*. He blamed the wine he had drank at dinner, for having *had so little* self-control in his interview with my mother. He

cursed his own folly, nay, accused her loveliness, heightened in his eyes by her agitation and tears for her husband, for his own madness in throwing off all disguise, and trying to compel her to listen to his vows. He recalled, with deep emotion, her terrified glance as she shrank from his approach, and the disdain with which she repelled him. Yes, even he, libertine as he was, had been awed by the withering scorn of an insulted and unprotected woman, and, mad as was the passion with which her exquisite beauty had inspired him, he was conscious that his spirit had quailed beneath her reproving glance, and that he dared not again encounter it. How great must be her contempt of *him*, who in the moment of her heavy trial, the arrest of her husband, when she most needed the solace of sympathy and respect, could violate all the laws of decorum and hospitality, and offer insult to her whom he should have sought to shield from aught approaching it. He struck his temples with his open hand as these thoughts passed through his mind. He accused himself, again and again, of having invaded the sanctity of his own roof, in offending a virtuous woman while beneath it, and almost loathed himself for having, by his mad conduct, driven her to seek shelter elsewhere. And Stratford, too! that worthy, that honest and disinterested man, who had so faithfully served him for years! who had borne, with a delicacy and patience unequalled, the privations which the irregularity and scantiness of the payments made to him must have occasioned! — who was, even now, deprived of his liberty, not for any debt of his own contracting, but for one of the very man who was plotting to injure him in the tenderest point, and who seized the opportunity afforded him by the incarceration of his poor secretary, to outrage his wife by licentious and open avowals of passion! Lord Willamere, although a libertine and a voluptuary, was not wholly destitute of good feeling; and there were moments in his life when the still small voice of conscience would make itself heard, and cause him to regret, that, in the reckless indulgence of his own evil propensities, he had inflicted injury on others. *He had not sufficient* firmness or self-control to resist *temptation, nor moral principle* enough to be aware of the enormity *of his misdeeds*, or of the extent of the evil entailed on others

by his transgressions. He really felt a good-will, and no inc derable degree of respect towards his secretary, and woul occasion offered, have rendered him any service in his po but, while ready to do this, he would not have scrupled to used every effort to seduce the wife of his bosom, and would laughed to scorn any attempt to make him sensible of the honour and turpitude of such conduct.

Fully convinced that Stratford would have sooner died connive at any dereliction from virtue in his wife, and that e doubt of her purity would render him inconsolable, he, n theless, would have heedlessly compromised her reputa rather than miss an opportunity of being in her company, would have exposed that of her worthy husband, by letting supposed that he tacitly acquiesced in his own dishonour. however, foiled in his schemes, and his intended victim h escaped from his power, he regretted his own rash conduct, experienced more pain at having aggravated the trials and ferings of his poor secretary, than any of his *roué* friends w have believed him capable of feeling. A sentiment of sham deep as it was unusual with him to know, mingled with hi reproach; and, had he had hundreds at his command at that ment, there is no doubt his first use of them would have be have released my father from every debt of his for which h liable, and to have paid him every shilling of the arrears of s for which he was indebted to him. Nay, more, he would, the opportunity offered at that crisis, have bestowed on his appointment he could have procured, as some reparation fo injury he had attempted to inflict on him. "Poor fell thought Lord Willamere, "I really do believe he liked me, liked me for myself alone. , He was, indeed, disinterested, devoted to my interest. Heigh ho! Why did he marry a w so exquisitely handsome, that nothing short of a saint, — Heaven knows I never set up to be one, — could have resiste charms, or have failed to endeavour to rival him in her affec And then to bring her to my house too! It was nothing sh madness. As well might one place untold heaps of gold w *reach of a thief*, and trust that he will not appropriate i

throw beauty like Mrs. Stratford's in sight of a fellow like me, and think I could behold it without wishing to possess it. Really, such husbands bring on, by their own folly, the evils which common prudence or knowledge of the world might avert, and have only themselves to blame for the result."

By such sophistry as this did Lord Willamere endeavour to silence the whispers of conscience, and after a brief time his self-reproach subsided into less painful feelings. He said to himself, that it was no use fretting about what could not be helped. He had not the money to free poor Stratford. When he got any, he would certainly do so (and he meant it at the time); but until then he would banish the whole affair from his mind: and he *did* banish it, by plunging into every species of amusement that offered, and by occupying his thoughts with more agreeable subjects. Yet this man, who after the lapse of a few days bestowed not a thought on the painful position to which my mother must be reduced, without money, and totally friendless, as he believed her and her husband to be, imagined that he had loved her! And so it is, that many heartless voluptuaries, like him, deceive themselves, and profane the sentiment of love, by mistaking the gross and sensual passion, which alone they are capable of feeling, for the pure and ennobling one which ever seeks the happiness of the object beloved, in preference to selfish enjoyment. Lord Willamere would after a few days had gone by, have forgotten the existence of the man whom he believed to be pining in a prison for *his* debts, had he not been reminded of it by piles of unopened and unanswered letters, the accumulation occasioned by Stratford's absence. He glanced with alarm on the heaps, which he had not sufficient moral courage to open, and dismissed his *maître d'hôtel*, Mr. Bermingham, angrily from his presence, for having reminded him that sundry creditors were impatient and clamorous for a settlement of their accounts, and that he had paid away his last shilling in discharging the various small items of daily expenditure; the latter assertion being wholly unfounded. The fact was, no sooner had the sapient Mr. Bermingham ascertained that Stratford was not likely to return to Willamere House, than he began to think of taking

advantage of his absence. The circumstance of Mr. Stratford's so abruptly quitting it, as well as Sally's letting drop some hints of the dear lady being too good to stay in a house where some people didn't know how to treat an angel when under their roof, had led to this conclusion on his part, and he determined on making an effort to increase the extent of his power, by busying himself in matters which had, hitherto, been exclusively confided to the jurisdiction of the secretary. He went to some of the least respectable of the tradespeople, made them understand that, henceforth, *he* would have the examination and arrangement of their accounts, and that, if made worth *his* while, he would not be so mean and scrupulous as Mr. Stratford, in regard to the quality or quantity of the articles furnished, and would be much more pressing with his lord of the payment of the bills. Urged on by the hope of a liberal per centage from these said tradesmen, Mr. Bermingham took the liberty of presenting himself, with a file of their bills, in the office of his lord and master; but his reception there was such as to convince him that he had miscalculated his powers of utility in a financial point of view: a discovery, however, which he carefully concealed from those most interested in the matter, and whom he deceived by promises he was aware that he had but little chance of performing.

To go on any longer without a private secretary, Lord Willamere felt to be impossible. He must, therefore, look out for one without loss of time; but, *en attendant*, how was he to get on, without money, until the next quarter's salary became due?

While he was reflecting on this point, a card, with a letter from a Mr. Humphry, was brought him. With Mr. Humphry his lordship had formerly had negotiations of rather a delicate nature, the result of which had been to transfer a certain number of hundreds of pounds into his lordship's purse, and an appointment of a certain yearly value to the brother of the said Mr. Humphry. The card reminded Lord Willamere of this fact, one which was never remembered without unpleasant twinges of conscience; for, *to have given* an appointment without any scrutiny into the character or capability of filling it of the person on whom it was conferred, was rendered still more blameable from the circumstance

that pecuniary motives had induced this dereliction from honour and duty. His lordship's poverty, rather than his will, had led to this culpable traffic; and this same cause operated as strongly at the present moment as on the former occasion.

"Yes; I will see Mr. Humphry," said he to his servant, "show him into my study."

Mr. Humphry, through the medium of some clerks in the government offices, with whom he kept up an acquaintance, managed to be generally *au fait* of appointments falling vacant, or about to be created. He now came to inform Lord Willamere that a certain one had fallen into his lordship's gift the previous night, through the death of the late holder, and he solicited it for a friend of his, a gentleman, as he said, of considerable abilities and high character; who, he added, was willing to pay a reasonable *douceur* for the appointment. Lord Willamere coloured, felt embarrassed for a moment, and had Mr. Humphry been skilled in reading the thoughts by the expression of the face; he would have discovered that his lordship had not yet entirely conquered the pride and delicacy peculiar to high-born men, before want of money, that leveller, and destroyer of such sentiments, has blunted them. But Mr. Humphry, a total stranger to such feelings, was unsuspicious of their existence in the breasts of others, and attributed the heightened colour of Lord Willamere to satisfaction at the prospect of an advantageous treaty with him, rather than to a latent sense of shame and humiliation at entering into such reprehensible negotiations. The very place now become vacant was the one designed for poor Stratford, as the one formerly granted through Mr. Humphry's arrangement had also been. This recollection flashed through the mind of Lord Willamere, and a sigh of real but transient regret followed it. "This man," thought he, "is the evil genius of Stratford. This is the second time that he has stepped between him and fortune;" and something of dislike towards Mr. Humphry was mingled with regret for Stratford. How anxious are men to turn the blame they merit, *to some one else!* It never occurred to Lord Willamere, *that his own reckless* extravagance, entailing pecuniary embarrassments *which* rendered money indispensable for their relief,

had prostrated the honourable principles which ought to have precluded his having recourse to negotiations like those entered into with Mr. Humphry, and that these, and *not* that person, had defeated the interests of poor Stratford.

There are always Mr. Humphrys to be found, ready to avail themselves of the laxity of principle and pecuniary wants of men in power; but his lordship, anxious to throw the blame off his own shoulders to those of another, looked on Mr. Humphry as the evil genius, as he termed it, of his late secretary. He was silent for some moments, and his companion, imagining that his taciturnity originated in some mental calculation on the value of the appointments solicited, resumed the topic.

"Your lordship will not, I hope, be very unreasonable in your demands."

Lord Willamere's cheeks again glowed, and he would have liked to have kicked his visitor out of the room, but he nevertheless vanquished his indignation, and observed that "the appointment was rather a lucrative one, and, consequently, a consideration in proportion to its value was naturally to be expected;" adding, that "as it was promised to another," (an assertion the truth of which Mr. Humphry wholly disbelieved, and took to be only made as a plea for a larger *douceur* for the appointment,) "he could not break his promise, unless the temptation to do so was very strong indeed."

This paltering with his own honour, or rather with the slight portion of it that still remained in his heart, cost Lord Willamere no inconsiderable effort; but he was urged on to it by the recollection of certain pressing debts of honour, the non-payment of which would compromise him in society; and also — yes, positively, Reader — also by the remembrance, that only through a supply to be obtained by the present mode, could he release poor Stratford from prison. This last reflection silenced his wavering scruples. He fancied that the *end* justified the *means;* nay, more, grown bold by something resembling a gleam of self-*satisfaction*, he determined to insist on a larger remuneration for *the appointment* than he might otherwise have been disposed to *require.*

"Well, my lord, what sum will your lordship really be satisfied with?" demanded Mr. Humphry, a little crest-fallen at the gravity of Lord Willamere, which he shrewdly guessed augured that the appointment would not be obtained on what he called reasonable terms.

"I will not accept a sous less than two thousand guineas," replied his lordship.

"Two thousand guineas is a very large sum, my lord, for my friend to sink. I had hoped that half that sum, or, at most, fifteen hundred pounds would have been considered sufficient."

The *fierté* of the nobleman was not all gone, although the honour and probity of the man had departed. Lord Willamere drew himself up to his full height; and when he did so, there was a dignity in his demeanour that seldom failed to produce an effect on those with whom he wished it to be successful. Mr. Humphry saw at a glance that no less than the sum named would be accepted. Nevertheless, he made one more attempt to economise some additional sum, however small, for himself.

"I am then to understand, my lord, that two thousand *pounds* is your ultimatum?"

"I said guineas, Sir," was the reply, uttered with as stately an air as if the speaker had never degraded himself, or was not even at the moment engaged in a transaction contrary to his duty.

"Well, my lord, the money shall be forthcoming the day that my friend is gazetted to the appointment."

Lord Willamere bit his nether lip; and, after a pause, said, "that half the sum would be very acceptable to him at that time."

"There 's many things between the cup and the lip, my lord," observed Mr. Humphry.

"You don't mean to insinuate, that having pledged myself to bestow the appointment on your friend, I would break my promise?" demanded the peer angrily.

"I beg pardon, my lord; but, as your lordship confessed to me a short time ago that you had promised this very appointment to *another, I thought*" — and here Mr. Humphry abruptly stopped. *for the glance of offended* dignity and fierceness of the earl, rendered him *fearful* of finishing the sentence he had been about to

careless, and, in short, my lord, was anything but civil," observed Mr. Bermingham; who, for reasons of his own, was very desirous that his lord and master's custom should be transferred to another job-man, a particular friend of his, who promised not only to supply him with a quiet and sure-footed nag whenever he wished to ride, but to allow him a certain per centage on the account, if he procured him Lord Willamere's custom.

"What a bore!" exclaimed his lordship. "Have my saddle-horses round as soon as possible, and I will call and reprimand Mr. Wilkinson."

"I hope his lordship won't let out what I said about the job-man being careless and uncivil, for, if he does, the truth may come out. I only said it just to get his lordship to take away his custom from him, for it 's no use letting a fellow go on serving with horses who won't give a per centage, when I know a man who will."

Lord Willamere was half inclined to send Bermingham to the bank, with the cheque, but a dislike to that person's seeing whose signature was to it, prevented his employing him on this occasion. He therefore rode to the bank, took the amount of the cheque in bank notes, and turned his horse's head towards the office of Mr. Spellerman, determined to give that gentleman wherewithal to release poor Stratford from prison, and a further sum towards the payment of the arrears of his salary. Lord Willamere felt such a real satisfaction in the prospect of discharging this duty, that it almost reconciled him to the means by which such an end was to be attained. His mind was relieved from a weight that had oppressed it ever since the arrest of Stratford for his debt, and could he have banished the recollection of his unsuccessful suit to the wife of that individual, he would have been comparatively happy. That, however, still rankled in his breast, and inflicted as deep a mortification on his vanity as on his heart. Unluckily for Lord Willamere's good intentions, the yard of the job-man with whom he dealt lay on the route to Mr. Spellerman's office; and more unluckily still, just as his lordship was passing the door, the job-man himself was entering it. Lord Willamere immediately dismounted, for the purpose of expostulating on the alleged complaints

made against that person, and for insisting on having fresh horses sent in place of those incapable of doing their work. Nothing could exceed the civility of Mr. Wilkinson, except it was his regret that he had not, at the moment, any horses worthy to replace those jobbed to his lordship. He would do anything in the world to please or oblige his lordship, but what could he do? Horses never were so dear, or money so scarce, as at the present time. Although thousands of pounds were due to him, he could not call in even a few hundreds. The nobility and gentry didn't like being asked for money, and he hoped none of 'em could say that *he* ever dunned 'em. No; he knew his place better.

This last hint appealed powerfully to Lord Willamere's feelings, by reminding him, that for the last three years, he had only paid a very small portion of his large account to Mr. Wilkinson.

To be sure, resumed that person, three of the finest horses he had seen for many years were that morning offered to him for sale, and at a very reasonable price too. Five hundred pounds were demanded; but ready money only would be accepted. He really had not that sum at command. If he had, he would not have hesitated a moment, for the horses were well worth seven hundred and fifty pounds. But what could he do? His lordship might look at them, if he pleased, for the owner had left them in the stable for a few hours, on the chance of their being seen by one of his customers.

"There can be no harm in just looking at them," thought Lord Willamere, as he followed Mr. Wilkinson to the stable.

"Lead out the horses, Tom," said Mr. Wilkinson.

"Yes, Sir," replied Tom, pulling down a fore lock of his hair, as a mark of respect.

"Just trot 'em out a bit."

The horses were trotted out; Mr. Wilkinson pointing out their perfections with all the *gusto* of a connoisseur, and the *savoir faire valoir* of an experienced dealer.

"Never saw finer steppers in my life, my lord. What capital action! There is not their match to be found in all England. I *only wish I wasn't so* poor at this moment, and I'd buy them at *once, and job them to* your lordship. I'd be sorry to see 'em with

My mother cast many an anxious glance to her husband, whose pallor, and total loss of appetite, alarmed and distressed her; for, although their kind host pressed him to eat, and repeatedly engaged him to do honour to his old sherry, he scarcely touched the good things set before him, and at length acknowledged that he felt too feverish to venture on drinking wine.

"You must not be cast down, Mr. Stratford," said Mr. Manvers; "only take care of your health, and I will procure you enough occupation, ay, and well paid occupation too, to secure your comfort and independence. I began the world with far less advantages than you possess. I had not your fine education, and, like you, was an orphan. I had nothing but a willing spirit, an active turn of mind, and a thorough conviction of the truth of the old proverb, that honesty is the best policy. The world has prospered with me. I am now well to do in life. If it pleased God to take me away to-morrow, I have wherewithal to provide amply and handsomely for these dear little girls, and have nothing to reproach myself with in the manner in which my fortune has been acquired. Take courage by my example, my good Sir. You are still a young man, with plenty of years before you to work, and leave your little miss as well off as both my girls will be after my death."

The two daughters of Manvers no sooner heard him utter the word death, than they rose, and with tears in their eyes ran to him, and, clinging to his neck, clasped him in their arms, as if they would shield him from the fell destroyer, whose very name filled their innocent hearts with terror. That terrible name was associated in their youthful minds with the loss of a dearly-loved mother, still fondly remembered. They had seen her fade away, day by day; her cheeks become paler, her eyes more lustrous; they had noticed her voice, always low and gentle, grow still more faint, when, with accents tremulous with love and emotion, she addressed the tender watchers around her couch — that couch she was doomed to leave no more. They saw her still lovely in death, *before the coffin-lid* shut out that calm pale face for ever from their *sight; and they* beheld that coffin, covered with its funeral pall, *borne from* the home, in which her presence had been wont to *diffuse happiness.* They remembered all this; hence, never did

they hear the solemn word Death, pronounced, that word so often irreverently uttered, without deep emotion; and when their father referred to his own decease they flew to him, as if they could save him from the approach of the King of Terrors.

Mr. Manvers well understood what was passing in their innocent hearts; and *his* thoughts, too, were with the dead, as he pressed with almost womanly fondness his motherless children to his breast.

My father and mother were not indifferent spectators of this little scene. A gloomy presentiment, often the forerunner of danger, flashed through the thoughts of my poor father, as an internal feeling of pain and debility impressed him with a sense of his own ruined health. He looked at his poor wife, bethought himself of how desolate *her* lot would be, and his child too, and tears rushed into his eyes. My mother believed that they arose from sympathy with the feelings of their host, and she loved him the more for this new proof of his sensibility, so perfectly in unison with her own. Had she known the real source of his emotion, how dreadful would have been her state! but "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," and she was to be yet for a time spared the wretchedness of knowing the affliction impending over her.

Mr. Manvers had been too well accustomed to watch the incipient approaches of the fearful malady that had snatched from him the wife of his bosom, not to feel some alarm as he marked the pallid brow of Stratford, and the bright hectic spot that frequently showed itself on his cheek.

A cough, that seemed to shake the chest of the sufferer, added to the alarm of his host, while my mother, from never previously having witnessed the insidious approaches of the disease, although anxious about what she believed to be but a temporary indisposition, was wholly ignorant of the extent of the danger that menaced a life infinitely dearer to her than her own. Mr. Manvers immediately called in the best medical aid; but to avoid alarming the patient, arranged that Dr. Rysdale was to drop in, as if by chance, be introduced as a friend of the host, and, by degrees, gain the *confidence of both the husband* and wife, and prescribe for the *former.*

When pressed by my father to inquire about a situation for him, — for the delicacy of the sick man made him recoil from trespassing on the hospitality of his kind friend, — Mr. Manver's would say, "Don't be uneasy, I can find you a situation any day, but you must first re-establish your health; that is the first point to be attended to, every thing else is subordinate to it."

Anxious to render herself useful, and in some way to repay the obligations conferred by Mr. Manvers, Mrs. Stratford devoted three hours of every day to the instruction of his children. Their docility and aptitude in learning, rendered her task a labour of love; and their progress delighted their fond parent so much, that he blessed the hour when he secured them, even for a limited time, the advantages of such an instructress.

But the peacefulness of his asylum, and the kindness of his host, availed not to check the ravages of the disease which was preying on the frame of Stratford. His cheek became daily more pale and shrunken; his eye more glassy, and his cough more frequent and harassing. Sleep and appetite forsook him; and his physician acknowledged to Mr. Manvers, that the remedies he had hitherto administered had, to his great regret and disappointment, produced no salutary effect. He suggested the propriety of seeking change of air; not, as he admitted, that he hoped any very material change from it; nevertheless it was right, he thought, to try every chance of preserving a life so valuable to Mr. Stratford's wife and child.

Mr. Manvers immediately engaged a house at Brompton, surrounded by a cheerful garden, sent to it many of the comforts so seldom to be found in lodging-houses; and in a very few days after the change of air had been recommended, he announced to the grateful couple that all was ready for their reception at their new abode. "When Mr. Stratford's health is restored, as I trust in God it soon will be," said the worthy man, "my girls will, with your permission, Madam," addressing Mrs. Stratford, "take up their abode with you, at the house I have taken for you."

Mr. and Mrs. Stratford possessed minds and hearts, not only *fully capable* of appreciating the generosity and delicacy of Mr. *Manvers' conduct* towards them, but fully capable of emulating b

towards others, had fortune enabled them to do so. The consciousness of this sentiment in their own breasts rendered their sense of obligations to their kind friend less painful and humiliating than if they themselves were less generously disposed; and Mrs. Stratford hoped a day might come, when it would be in his power to prove her deep sense of the favours conferred on her and her husband, in their hour of need.

CHAPTER XI.

Neither my father nor mother were persons who could feel happy while depending solely on the charity or kindness of others. In proportion to the warm sense they entertained of the generosity exercised towards them, was their dread of trespassing too much on it; and while those with less delicacy would have enjoyed the present advantages afforded them, without any scruple, they shrank from the bare idea of encroaching on a hospitality, the value of which no one could better appreciate. They had a spirit of honest independence, as far removed from false pride as from ingratitude, that led them to wish to *earn* their daily bread by their own exertions; and they felt that to live *in idleness*, though even but for a short time, would be too painful and humiliating, owing, as they already did, so mighty an obligation to Mr. Manvers. "Let us at least, for a few days, rest in peace and quiet here, dearest," said my mother, as she marked the pale face and thoughtful brow of her dejected husband; "Mr. Manvers, who is so considerate and kind, may be able to hear of some situation or occupation, by which we can earn a subsistence. I can, perhaps, through the medium of his extensive connexions and recommendations, go out to give lessons as a daily governess; and with your talents and knowledge, it will be hard, indeed, if we cannot find means to live."

My father tried to smile an assent to his wife's hopes and projects; but the smile was so faint, so sickly, that it indicated how much less *sanguine* were his expectations than hers. A secret *presentiment filled his heart*, that the slow fever, occasioned by *anxiety, which had so long* been undermining his health, and

which the events of the last two days had greatly increased, had struck at the vital principle; and as he looked on his adored wife and child, likely to be soon left unprovided for and friendless, in a world in which he had found only endless toil, repaid by deceit and ingratitude, from him for whom he had used his best exertions, a cold shudder came over him, and he almost wished that they, too, might share the sleep of death, which he felt an internal conviction would soon be his. The base conduct of Lord Willamere had wounded my father to the heart's core, and struck at the very root of his life. In vain had he endeavoured to seek a refuge from the bitter thoughts that preyed on his very existence, in the deep contempt which conduct like that of Lord Willamere was so well calculated to inspire in a noble mind and generous heart like his. But his natural sensibility was stronger than his acquired philosophy, and triumphed over every effort which the latter suggested, to pluck forth the poisoned arrow from his heart. My father, too, was a proud, though a poor man, and could ill brook the bitter knowledge, that the wife of his bosom — the only being who had ever loved him, or whom he had loved — should have her name made the subject of slander, or be profaned by the ribald jests of the heartless voluptuaries who associated with the libertine Lord Willamere. And now hope, the delusive syren, had ceased to cheat him. A conviction of his own state, and its probable result, had taken possession of his mind; and the prospect of being torn from his wife and child, fraught with bitterness, excited his affection for those beloved objects into a morbid tenderness, that served to aggravate the fatal disease that was preying on him. His eyes would follow his wife wheresoever she moved, or dwell on their child, until tears of human fondness, wrung from him by the thought that he must soon leave those dear beings, would fill them.

There is a love, so deep, so devoted, that the thought of leaving the object of it is too terrible to be entertained, even for a moment; and the heart turns with the same instinctive shudder *from such a* possibility, as the body shrinks from the scalpel of *the surgeon* who comes prepared to perform some horrible operation *on it.* Such was the love of my mother for her husband. We

a change in his pale face, not an alteration in his burning hand, escaped her; and every symptom in his malady was noted with a fearful exactness, that proved but too well how she marked the phases of it. Yet, though she saw him day after day grow more weak, and heard the cruel cough that shook his poor chest, as if it would burst it, she dared not anticipate the terrible result of all this suffering, and clung to hope, though there was no longer anchorage for it. Oh! how the fear of parting increases affection, those only can tell who have experienced the agony of beholding the person dearest in life in danger. Then it is, that the chain of affection seems newly rivetted, as if to resist the possibility of being rent asunder; and that the love previously felt, however fond, however true, appears light in comparison with the actual present, when to all the past is added the vague, but terrible dread of the future; that future, when even the happiness of watching over the invalid may be denied, and the cold grave may contain the form for which no couch that love can smooth, is now deemed sufficiently soft.

"No, it won't, it can't be," would my mother say to herself, when some fearful anticipation of losing her adored husband almost made her heart die within her tortured breast. "It would be too, too terrible. God is too good, too merciful, to try me so far beyond my strength to bear. No; he will not be taken from me. He may live, denied the blessing of health, and all its enjoyments; be a helpless invalid, confined to one chamber; but this, even this, will be happiness to me, compared with the dread, the horror of losing him for ever; of feeling alone, in a cold and pitiless world, after having known the blessing, the unutterable blessing, of a love like his."

The day arrived that my father was to be removed from the house of Mr. Manvers to the one taken for him at Brompton. A hired carriage, of the most easy and comfortable kind that could be procured, was engaged to convey him, into which he was assisted by his kind friend, with two of his clerks, and propped up by pillows; *and his* head resting on the shoulder of his wife, *the female servant and* child occupying the opposite seat of the *vehicle, he was driven* towards Brompton.

It was a bright and beautiful day. The streets were filled with gaily dressed persons; innumerable carriages and equestrians were passing along on every side, which gave the air of a *fête* day to the whole scene. What a contrast did it offer to the feelings of the hapless pair, who turned from it with sadness, as if the bright sunshine and gaiety around them increased their sense of the desolation of their own hearts. What to them were the emblazoned carriages whirled along by proud and stately steeds; the gaudy-liveried menials that belonged to them; and the richly dressed occupants, who bestowed not even a passing glance on the humble vehicle that was conveying them to the quiet home where they were to await the sentence that was to decide the fate of both, the sentence of life or death to my father! This pair, in the midst of a gay and busy population, each member of which was occupied solely with his or her own cares, or pleasures, felt that they were alone. Shut out from the sympathies of those among whom they glided, they were, as some poor and humble stream that flows into the ocean, lost and confounded in the vast mass into which they were plunged, and they instinctively pressed closer to each other, as this conviction forced itself on their minds. Their passage was obstructed by the crowd around the gates at Hyde Park, assembled in the hope of seeing the Sovereign pass, and for some minutes their carriage could not move on. My mother would fain have escaped the careless and indifferent glances of the gay personages, whose eyes, for a brief moment, rested on the pale face of her husband, and then turned, with an altered expression, to hers, — for beauty, however chastened by sorrow, is always attractive to the idle loungers of fashion; but she dreaded to avert her head, lest the movement should derange that of the dear invalid resting on her shoulder, and so only cast down her eyes when the inquisitive and impertinent gaze of the equestrians, who peered into the carriage, caused the blood to mount to her delicate cheek.

"Look there, Villamere; did you ever behold a more lovely face?" exclaimed a fashionable looking man to his companion, directing his attention to the humble vehicle of my parents; "by

Jove! the sick man is to be envied, for possessing so beautiful a nurse."

Lord Willamere turned quickly round, ever anxious in his search for beauty, and his glance met the death-like face of his poor secretary, whose languid eye rested for a moment on his countenance, and then closed, as if to shut out some object too painful to be longer contemplated. A momentary pang shot through the libertine's heart, as his eye took in the face of the dying man, for that my father was dying, he felt as convinced as of his own identity. From him his eyes turned to the face of my mother, which, though still beautiful as ever, was impressed with such care and sadness, as proclaimed that she had suffered much since they had last met. She had not seen Lord Willamere, for, distressed by the gaze of his companion, she had avoided again looking in the direction where he was; but her husband had recognised him, and the shudder that shook his frame alarmed her so much, that she feared some sudden change for the worse in his health had occasioned it. "It was only a spasm, dearest," replied my father, in answer to her inquiry, "I shall be better when we are out of this crowd."

The sight of the man he had loved and trusted, but who had so basely betrayed the confidence he had reposed in his honour, greatly agitated the weak frame of the poor invalid, and although he struggled to conquer his emotion, and named not the subject to his wife, it became evident to her that some sudden change had occurred, which deteriorated his previous state. Lord Willamere looked no more towards the carriage which contained those he had so deeply injured. Remorse, an unusual visitor in his heart, had found entrance, and his aspect underwent such an alteration, that when his companion again demanded his opinion of the beautiful woman he had pointed out, he asked him if he felt unwell.

"Only a slight head-ache," was the answer. A slight heart-ache, would have been nearer the truth.

"I 've a great mind to follow the carriage and discover where this beauty dwells," said Sir Henry Riverstock.

"You will gain nothing by it," observed Lord Willamere, "for the lady is evidently a modest woman."

"No other would be worth the trouble of pursuit," was the reply, "forbidden fruit alone is tempting."

"But even so warm an admirer of beauty and modesty as Sir Henry Riverstock, might pause before he subjects a woman in affliction, as the one we have just seen evidently is, to annoyance by a pursuit wholly unencouraged by even a glance of hers," rejoined the peer.

There was a sarcastic severity in the tone and manner of Lord Willamere, as he uttered these words, that instantly led his companion to conclude that his lordship had a more than ordinary interest in the fair unknown. His sudden change of countenance the moment after he saw her, and his ill-dissembled anxiety to prevent him from following her carriage confirmed his suspicions, and decided him on pursuing the bent of his own inclinations, by keeping the vehicle in view.

"I had no notion, my dear Willamere," said the baronet, "that you were so considerate of the feelings of those who attract your admiration, as your advice just now given would lead me to suppose. Come, be frank and own the truth. Have you not tried to dissuade me from following this *belle incognito*, merely because you intend to take a similar step yourself?"

Lord Willamere, albeit unused to blush, felt his cheeks glow at this charge; but recovering his self-possession, he asserted on his word of honour that he had no such intention.

"Then you have more self-control, or less admiration for the lady than I possess," observed Sir Henry Riverstock, "so adieu;" and he turned his horse's head towards the road to Kensington, the direction which the carriage in which my parents were had taken, and soon overtook it. He had, however, sufficient sense, if not delicacy, to remain behind the carriage, desirous of not offending the lovely woman it contained, until he reached the spot where the road leads off on the left to Brompton, where he met *Mr. Addington*, one of the roué cronies of Lord Willamere. This *gentleman had* seen and recognised my parents, and the encounter *had brought* back fresh to his mind his having formerly met them

at Willamere House, and the scandal that Lord Henry Middlecourt and he had then imagined, and afterwards circulated relative to the supposed *liaison* between Lord Willamere and the handsome Mrs. Stratford, as also of the secretary's connivance at the intrigue.

"How-d'ye-do, Riverstock," exclaimed Mr. Addington. "I 've just seen in that fly," pointing to the one in front, "a devilish beautiful woman; a flame of Willamere's, and the wife of his secretary, who, *par parenthèse*, looks as if he is not likely to trouble his frail rib long with his presence. The poor devil is evidently dying."

"Hah! hah! my Lord Willamere, I have caught you, have I?" soliloquized Sir Henry Riverstock. "This explains your anxiety to prevent my following the carriage of the fair one. Would you believe it, Addington, when I pointed out the lady in question to Willamere, believing that he had never seen her before, the sly dog affected not to know her; and when I proposed to ride after her carriage in order to discover her abode, he preached me as moral a lesson as if he were a saint, and I only a sinner. But are you quite sure, my dear fellow, that the lady is the person you assert her to be?"

"Perfectly. I recognised her at one glance. Indeed she is too pretty to be easily mistaken for another. I once passed some hours in her company, much to her dissatisfaction, I dare be sworn, for she looked deucedly put out of her way by the intrusion of Henry Middlecourt and myself into the dining-room of Willamere, where she, her *cara sposo*, and his lordship, made a trio at dessert, quite *en famille*. Willamere wished us anywhere else, I could plainly see, and endeavoured to dupe us, by assuming towards the lady as deferential an air as if she were a duchess, instead of the wife of his secretary; who, poor man, was enjoying his fruit to all appearance wholly unconscious that he stood in a peculiarly false position, as either a dishonourable, or a deceived husband."

"I am sorry I must leave you," said Sir Henry Riverstock, "*for I have an engagement*, so good bye."

"*A bonne fortune*, I conclude," was the reply; "for those

are the only engagements men attend to in our times;" and off rode Mr. Addington to London, while the baronet galloped briskly after the carriage which held the object that had excited so great an interest in his breast.

When some days before Lord Willamere had paid away the money to Mr. Wilkinson, the horse-dealer, and secured the horses, agreeing to give an increased yearly stipend for their hire on job, in consideration of the great price that person alleged he had given for them, he rode away in a different direction from that which he had originally intended taking. It was now useless, he felt, to see Mr. Spellerman, as he had no longer the money to give him to liberate my father. "Well, after all, a few days more or less incarceration can't be of much consequence to him," thought the peer, "a lock-up house is, I understand, no very bad place — a sort of ready-furnished lodging, as I have heard, only different from others, inasmuch as the lodger is not permitted to leave it until the proprietor is quite satisfied that there is no detainer remaining there against him. Heaven be praised, I have no personal experience of those sort of places! Glorious privilege of the peerage! which keeps us, the porcelain of human clay, safe from such contamination. Yes, I dare say Stratford has his comforts around him; his beautiful wife by his side! Who would not submit to a prison to secure a *tête-à-tête* with such a creature? He is not much to be pitied with such a companion. Yet husbands are such strange dogs, especially after a year of marriage, that a prison might seem to a benedict no less gloomy with a wife than without one. I 'll certainly relieve poor Stratford the moment I receive the money from Mr. Humphry, and that must be in a few days. *En attendant*, I will think no more of him, which will be much the wisest plan, for boring myself about his imprisonment can do *him* no good, and would only put me into the blue devils. I certainly am a devilish kind-hearted fellow in the main, for I have had no fewer than a dozen disagreeable twinges of conscience since poor Stratford was arrested on my account; and if I had not so much philosophy as I possess, I should really have been as gloomy as a gamester on awaking in the morning, after he has lost his last guinea. Yes, philosophy is a

marvellously good thing in such emergencies. It consoles us wonderfully in the misfortunes that befall our friends. It is a pity it is not so successful in those that assail ourselves."

An organ, played by an Italian boy, at that moment struck up a merry tune, and this incident, so trifling in itself, gave an entire change to the thoughts of Lord Willamere. Strange power of music, to abstract us from the actual present, and transport us to other scenes! The tune was a favourite one with the Duchess of Rosehampton, and Willamere had, during the heyday of his passion for that lovely, but erring woman, often danced with her to its measure. A vision of her sparkling eyes and sweet smile at such moments flashed on his memory, and he bethought him of his past triumphs, when, envied by half the men who helped to fill the gilded *salons de bal* in the great houses in London, he led the lovely duchess, sparkling in diamonds, and "the observed of all observers," through the mazy dance. There had been more of sentiment in Willamere's unhallowed *liaison* with the Duchess, than in any other of his numerous *bonne fortunes*. The reason was, that she was not as lightly won as his other conquests. Poor woman! Nature meant her to be something better than a mere leader of the ton; one of those heartless, soulless butterflies, who bask in the sunshine of fashion, and waste their lives in its frivolous pursuits and pleasures.

Left an orphan while yet in infancy, she had, unhappily, no watchful mother to instill precepts of religion and morality into her mind, to watch over her youth, and to guide her through the perils that beset the path of the young and fair. She had no father or brother to shield her from the advances of the worthless or designing, or to warn her ere she irrevocably bestowed her hand on one undeserving the boon. Left to the guardianship of a distant relation, who thought he was conscientiously fulfilling the charge consigned to him, when he engaged a governess, strongly recommended by a lady of high rank, to preside over the instruction of his fair ward, and duly attended to the care of her large fortune, the Lady Adelaide St. John grew up to be an accomplished woman. She was an admirable musician; drew in a masterly style; danced *almost too well for a lady*, as many matrons with daughters less

skilled in the science of Terpsichore, and the said daughters themselves, averred; rode like an amazon; walked like a Diana; and was so naturally graceful, that her every movement enhanced the rare beauty of her face and figure. But while no pains nor expense were spared in perfecting her accomplishments, her moral training had been wholly neglected. With warm feelings, a kind heart, and its too frequent accompaniment, a quick temper, she was never taught to regulate the first, nor to control the latter. She would melt with pity over a tale of distress, yet the next moment inflict pain by some ebullition of anger occasioned by a trifle. She wished all around her to be happy, would have willingly made any sacrifice to accomplish this, was incapable of any malice, but expected, as a right, that she herself was to be also exempt from the ills to which human flesh are heirs. She was impatient under the trials that await even the most favoured of Fortune's pets, and resented as a personal injury any *contre temps* that militated against her schemes of pleasure. There was so much goodness in her nature, that a skilful hand might have easily eradicated the weeds that had sprung up in the too rich soil; but unfortunately Madame de Tremonville was the last person in the world to discover their roots, or, even had she marked them, to pluck them out. The warmth of her pupil's feelings she cherished, rather than attempted to regulate. Her kindness of heart she loved, nay, almost idolized her for, because innumerable and gratifying proofs of it were continually evinced towards herself; and her quickness of temper was tolerated, if not encouraged, as demonstrative of genius, which Madame de Tremonville declared was always accompanied by a certain vivacity of temper, as is exemplified by the term "*genus irritabile*," always applied to clever persons.

Married while yet little more than a child, the duke, though tenderly attached to her, was so wholly engrossed by politics as to have little time to devote to his beautiful and inexperienced wife, who, left without a guide to advise, or a friend to guard her, soon became engulphed in the vortex of fashion.

Such was the woman who had fallen a prey to the artful and *practised* seducer, Lord Willamere; and who, haunted by the

remorse which never fails, sooner or later, to follow unhallowed *liaisons*, now wept in anguish her lapse from virtue, and the ingratitude of him who, having been "loved, not wisely but too well," had lured her from it. Fierce was the war which love, pride, and remorse waged in her tortured breast, even while yet her seducer, unsated by possession, proved by his unremitting attention, the passion he felt for her. Every hour of his absence found her wretched. She trembled before the unsuspecting husband, whose honour she had betrayed in forfeiting her own. Every word of kindness from him seemed like a dagger plunged into her heart, and made her feel ready to fall at his feet, avow her guilt, and draw on her head all its humiliating, its fearful consequences. Her depression of spirits, her altered looks, the traces of tears so often visible on her pale cheeks, alarmed, and excited a fresh interest in her fond husband, every proof of which inflicted agony on the wretched woman. She hardly dared to meet his glance, and fancied that even indifferent spectators could read on her brow the stamp of shame. She trembled before her servants; for they, as she rightly imagined, must have formed their own conclusions on the frequency of Lord Willamere's visits, and of her interviews with him in Kensington Gardens. Such had been the state of her feelings for some time, when her lover, who had been of late so remiss in his attentions as to alarm her pride, and wound her affection, surprised her by a visit. The vision his memory had conjured up, by the aid of the tune played by the organ in the street, had induced this tardy visit. He cheated himself into the expectation of finding her radiant in beauty as before tears of repentance had stained her cheeks, and dimmed the lustre of her eyes, and he fancied that, after a few reproaches, uttered more in sorrow than in anger, she would accept the falsehoods he meant to urge in extenuation of his neglect. But her changed aspect, her impaired beauty, and evidently destroyed health, which might have awakened pity in the sternest breast, excited only anger in his callous one. He reproached, instead of attempting to soothe her. Asked how she could hope that after having committed the suicide of her own beauty, she could retain the heart it had *enthralled*, and whether any lover could give up

his time to one who was always steeped in tears. The indignation of the duchess was for some time too great for words — to be taunted by *him* who had plunged her into guilt and shame, who had steeped her nightly pillow, to which sleep was now a stranger, in tears, was not to be borne. "Begone," said she, when words found utterance; "never again presume to appear before me. I loathe myself for having stooped to love one so heartless, so worthless; and my turpitude is increased tenfold in my own eyes, by the discovery that you have no one quality to extenuate my crime."

Angered beyond the power of gentlemanly forbearance, Lord Willamere arose to depart. "Remember," said he spitefully, "that when your ill-humour has ceased, you may find that I am not to be recalled," and he left the room.

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Great was the regret next day, when the sudden death of the young and beautiful Duchess of Rosehampton was announced. Her grace had complained of indisposition when she went to dress for dinner; grew worse, and found herself unable to leave her chamber. She refused to permit a physician to be sent for, and was found a corse next morning when her *femme de chambre* entered her room. An empty bottle, marked "Laudanum," discovered by her bed-side, revealed the cause of her death. She had of late become compelled to have recourse to it to procure sleep, and, urged to desperation, had in a moment of phrenzy swallowed its contents.

Her husband mourned her long and deeply; and, ignorant of her sin and its results, believed that the over-dose which produced her death had been taken through mistake. Young, beautiful, blessed with rank, wealth, and so fondly beloved by him, he could not imagine a cause for her committing suicide. No, she must have taken the deadly potion without being aware of its strength, and he must ever regret her loss. There were, however, some who but too well guessed the truth. One was the *femme de chambre*, who saw her, pale as marble, and deluged in tears, enter with unsteady steps her dressing-room, a few minutes after Lord Willamere had left the house. *She* marked the *look* of utter despair which revealed what was passing in the

broken heart of her mistress, when the duchess desired to be left alone that fatal night; and so impressed was she by a dread of some impending catastrophe, that, had the duke been at home, she would have confessed her fears that it was not safe to have the duchess left alone. Unfortunately, the duke was at the House of Lords, and returned not until all was over. Although the suspicion that a guilty attachment existed between their lady and Lord Willamere had long been excited in the minds of the servants, such was the good-will her gentleness and goodness had created in their breasts, and so strong was the respect they entertained for the duke, that no whisper ever betrayed the secret. The *femme de chambre*, who had for some time marked the unhappiness of the duchess, and surmised the cause, would have died sooner than breathe a word that could darken her fame, or lead the betrayed and bereaved husband to suspect, that the wife whose sudden death he so deeply deplored, had been unworthy of his affection. It was remarked that whenever by chance Lord Willamere's name was mentioned in her presence, she would turn deadly pale, and a shudder would pass over her frame; but when questioned why this occurred, she would give some excuse, and change the subject. The sudden death of the duchess greatly shocked Lord Willamere. He had anticipated no such tragical catastrophe, and for some time it affected his spirits, and he blamed himself for his unkindness at their last interview. But after a few months she was thought of no more, save when a street organ happened to play her favourite air, and then he would turn pale and sigh. The tune, however, like all other ones, became old-fashioned, and ceased to be played by the organs, so he was released from this last reminder of her whose peace he had destroyed, and whom he had driven to self-destruction.

CHAPTER XII.

We left Sir Henry Riverstock following the carriage that contained Mr. and Mrs. Stratford. He had the tact and decency not to come so near it as to be seen by its occupants; and as he observed it stop in front of the garden-gate of a small but neat cot-

tage, into which the invalid was assisted by his wife and a female servant, he stopped his horse until they had time to pass into the house, and then, having noted the locality, he retraced his route to the Park. The intelligence of the supposed frailty of the fair object of his pursuit, conveyed by Mr. Addington, only served to encourage the evil designs excited by her beauty in the mind of the libertine baronet. Why might not *he* seek to please, and win her smiles, as well as Lord Willamere had done? Was *he* not as good-looking, much younger, and richer than his lordship? and why therefore not aspire to the same success? So reasoned Sir Henry Riverstock, as he slowly rode back to the park, his thoughts occupied by the lovely woman he had seen, and bent on leaving no effort untried to gain her favour. This incipient passion did not, however, deter him from examining every pretty woman he saw in the Park, as if each not personally known to him were an attainable object; or in fact, as if the women were, like horses exposed in a dealers yard, led forth to be exhibited to the highest bidder.

"*She* is handsomer, a thousand times handsomer than any of them," said he to himself. "What a lucky fellow Willamere was to have won her, and in the meridian of her beauty too, before she had become so pale and delicate as at present. But this paleness and delicacy will subside when she comes to be no longer constantly immured with that sickly husband of hers. The being shut up with such an unhealthy fellow is enough to make any woman look ill. It is like renewing the old story of Mezentius, chaining the living to the dead, to have such fine a creature tied to that poor faded shrunken skeleton, who has scarcely a breath of life left in his body. I 'll write to her at once. Or, let me see, shall I wait a little? Her husband can't last long, and women's hearts are said to be peculiarly softened during the first days of widowhood."

Thus reflected the sensual and libertine Sir Henry Riverstock, to whom a doubt of the truth of the statement of Mr. Addington never occurred. Indeed, he seldom questioned any scandalous story, for, judging of the mass of mankind by self, he was prone to give credence to every evil that could be imputed to it.

It is long since we left Mr. and Mrs. Stratford entering the *abode* near Brompton, provided for them by their kind and con-

liberate friend, Mr. Manvers. In it they found every comfort that an invalid could require, and both husband and wife, as they looked around on the neat and cheerful rooms, and into the garden, gay with flowers, and enlivened by the carols of innumerable birds, mentally blessed him to whom they owed so much.

"The pure air and quiet of this sweet place, will, with the blessing of God, restore you," said the doting wife, as she looked fondly and anxiously at the pale face and sunken eyes of her husband.

He shook his head sorrowfully, but spoke not, and turned away to hide his emotion. Oh! what a pang shot through his wife's heart at that moment, as his conviction of the utter hopelessness of his case was revealed to her by his silence, and the emotion he tried to conceal. She struggled to master her feelings and assume a calm demeanour, while her heart was torn by grief and dread; but a tremulous movement of her lips, and an increased paleness of her face, betrayed what she felt.

Day after day, did she examine with the watchful eyes of love, the altered aspect of her husband. The pure air and quiet, on which she had so much counted for effecting a beneficial change in his state, had failed to produce the desired end, and each hour saw him become more deathly pallid, more emaciated, and more languid than before; while a cough that shook his feeble frame, but too well proclaimed that consumption, that most terrible of maladies, was making rapid strides in its destructive progress to end his life. He would lay for hours dozing on a sofa in the chamber, so death-like, that his labouring breath alone proved he was still a denizen of earth, and his wife would fix her eyes on that pale brow, and those sharply chiselled features which the finger of approaching Death had already touched, as if to imprint them on her memory, while tears, bitter, burning tears, would chase each other down her cheeks.

Often would the pallid sleeper murmur her name in a tone of such deep tenderness, as to thrill through her heart, while heavy sighs heaved his breast, and proved that even in slumber, he was haunted by the thought of their coming separation. At such moments she would look from the sleeping father to his slumber-

ing child. The one with the pallor of death on his brow, marking how fleetly the sands of life were ebbing, and the other rosy, plump, and dimpled, smiling in its dreams, unconscious of the state of the authors of its being, and of the fate impending over them.

"Could I but preserve him, even thus," Mrs. Stratford would say, as she gazed on her husband, "I would be content. To watch over him as now; to guard his slumbers from interruption; to minister to his wants; — oh! it would be happiness! But to know that the dear face I am now looking on will soon be hidden from my eyes for ever, that, shut from the light of day in the dark and narrow grave, the worms will prey on it, and decay deface those fair lineaments, — O God! O God! the bitterness of death is in such thoughts, and reason staggers beneath a load of anguish too heavy to be borne. Would to heaven that our helpless child and I were summoned to accompany my husband to the grave! Pardon me, O merciful Father, if weak and sinful, I shrink from the cup of bitterness *thou* hast willed I should drink to the very dregs. Have mercy on me, and take me and the child that thou hast given me hence, for I have not courage to live after the grave shall have closed over my husband."

How mournful and tender were the communings of the dying husband and doting wife, during the days that intervened between their earthly separation. How did he, full of faith in the divine mercy of his heavenly father, endeavour to reconcile her to the inevitable blow that would leave her a lonely mourner on earth, and a dependant on the kindness of Mr. Manvers. But though the pious resignation of the Christian was exerted to chasten the grief of the fond husband and father, it could not always subdue the anguish with which he contemplated a separation from those so dear to him. He would, when he believed himself unobserved, gaze on his wife and child until tears blinded him, and he would turn his face away to conceal his emotion, lest it might inflict a *fresh pang* on the tender nurse who seldom left his pillow.

One day, when the weather was more than usually sultry, and *that its enervating* effect made itself felt by an increased languor *and exhaustion* of his debilitated frame, his wife, while using a

fan to cool his fevered brow, said she longed for the fresh breezes of autumn to bring restored health to him.

"Alas! dearest, health will never more visit me," replied he. "Cheat not yourself, my Emily, with illusive hopes. I shall leave you before the first autumnal breeze sweeps the leaves from those trees we both daily look on."

"Say not, oh! say not so, William," and the speaker arose and pressed him in her arms, as if to preserve him from the grasp of the destroyer Death, while a torrent of tears bathed her cheeks. "You will yet recover. The Almighty will take pity on me, and knowing my weakness will not try me beyond my strength of endurance. Oh! William, I could not part from you, I could not see you die!" and the frame of the wretched wife shook in agony. Never previously had she dared to contemplate the terrible result of the malady that she saw day by day making such fearful inroads on the life of her husband. That he was in danger, in imminent danger, she could not conceal from herself, though, with the delusion peculiar to love in such cases, she refused to believe the possibility of the calamity which menaced her. It was too dreadful to be supported even in thought; and if for a moment it suggested itself, her terrified imagination shrunk from it, and, with a shudder, she would say, "Oh! no; God is too good. *He*, who knows the secrets of all hearts, and the weakness of his poor sinful children, knows that such a blow would indeed overwhelm me, and leave my poor child doubly an orphan."

But now to hear from his own lips a confirmation of fears too terrible to be admitted, even in thought, struck her to the heart, and sounded a funeral knell to departed hope. No longer could she cheat herself, or shut her eyes to the dreadful truth; and with this conviction came a stunning sense of despair and desolation, that almost deprived her of the power to quell the demonstrations of her agony, which she felt must inflict such pain on her husband.

"I feared this, my poor Emily," said he, "and have long wished, but had not courage, to prepare you for what is inevitable. Remember that we part not for ever, that life soon passes, that you will follow me, and that we shall, through the

mercy of our blessed Redeemer, be hereafter reunited where no more partings are."

How eagerly did her ears drink in the sounds of that dear voice, soon to be hushed in the silence of death! Was it indeed possible that his days were numbered? that soon the dark grave would hide from her view that dear face, now beaming on her with unutterable love? She could not speak. Every attempt to pronounce even a single word brought on a sense of suffocation that threatened to overpower her. So, mute and motionless, save by the quick rising of her agitated breast, she remained plunged in grief.

Oh! how overwhelming is the first conviction that the object dearest to us on earth is about to be snatched from us for ever! How do we gaze on those features that must soon be shut out from our sight, how listen to those accents that never uttered an unkind word, and which will soon meet our ears no more! The deep emotion of her husband had so exhausted his weak frame that he sank into a gentle sleep, during which his unhappy wife found a momentary relief in tears. They flowed long and silently. She suffered no sob to escape from her oppressed heart, nor did her tearful eyes turn from the pale and attenuated face before her; which, save for the motion produced by his quick respiration, might have been mistaken for that of the dead. The door of the chamber opened, and the female servant who waited on Mrs. Stratford entered with a letter addressed to her. "It was brought by a groom, Ma'am," whispered she, "who said he would call to-morrow for an answer." Having made a sign to her not to disturb the sleeper, Mrs. Stratford put the letter into her pocket without bestowing a thought on whom it might come from, nor did it occur to her memory again until the next day, when the maid came to inform her that the servant who had brought the letter the previous day, had called, and was waiting for an answer.

"What letter, dearest?" asked her husband.

"I had totally forgotten it," replied his wife, drawing it from her pocket with its seal unbroken.

"I thought we had been forgotten by all, except our kind

friend, Mr. Manvers," observed Mr. Stratford, as he looked at his wife, who opened the letter with an indifference and carelessness that betokened how little interest it occasioned; but soon her aspect changed — her pale cheek became crimsoned, her eyes darted glances of anger and indignation, and in a voice tremulous with emotion, she told the servant that there was no answer.

"Something in that letter has moved, has agitated you, Emily. Is it as I suspect? Has that unprincipled man, Lord Willamere, whom I saw in Piccadilly the day we were coming here, discovered our abode, and again renewed his insults?"

The face of the speaker, previously pale as death, was now flushed by indignation, and his hand trembled as he held it forth for the letter.

"It is not from that bad man, my dear William, I assure you it is not."

"Then why did its perusal agitate and distress you, my own Emily?"

"The least thing agitates me of late," replied Mrs. Stratford, endeavouring to assume a careless air, though trembling lest her husband should insist upon seeing the letter, which would, she was well aware, excite emotions most injurious in his weak state.

"Let me read it, Emily?" and he held out his hand eagerly for the letter.

"Do not read it, dear William. Oblige me by not insisting on it."

"We have too short a time to be together, my poor love, for me to forego one of the dear privileges you accorded me when you blessed me with your hand, that of having no secrets between us."

"But this odious letter will only vex you. I know not its vile writer, and why should we bestow a single thought on him or it?"

"I will see it, Emily!" and the sick man, with an impatience very unusual in him, and which was probably the effect of the fever preying on his exhausted frame, motioned to have the

letter given to him. Fearing that a continued opposition to his wishes might be as injurious as a perusal of the hated epistle, his wife resigned it to his trembling hand, her own as tremulous; but scarcely had his eyes glanced over the first few lines, ere his face became suffused with the red blush of wounded pride and indignation, even to his very temples, and he sunk back exhausted, and gasping for breath, on his pillow. A violent paroxysm of coughing rapidly ensued, which terribly shook his frame, and was followed by an ensanguined stream, which gushed from his mouth, threatening immediate death by suffocation. The cries of his distracted wife brought a servant to her aid. A messenger was dispatched for the next medical man, who was soon in attendance, and who tried, but, alas! in vain, to stay the ebbing tide of life, for ere an hour had elapsed, he had ceased to breathe. No tears, no groan, marked the bereaved wife's sense of the calamity that had befallen her. Pale, and motionless as a statue, with her eyes fixed on the face of the departed, and his lifeless hand still clasped convulsively in hers, she seemed unconscious that he was indeed gone for ever, and heedless of the reiterated requests of the doctor and the servant, that she should retire to another room. But when with a gentle force they endeavoured to remove her from the spot, she resisted their efforts with an unnatural strength for so slight a frame, and breaking from their arms, she threw herself on the body of her husband, and clasping it wildly to her breast, fell into strong convulsions. Though accustomed to such trying scenes of grief, the overwhelming agony he here witnessed made a deep impression on Mr. Dawkins, the surgeon, and he used every effort that his skill and experience could suggest, to afford relief to his patient. But the fiat had gone forth, and human skill was vain. At the expiration of three days she ceased to suffer, and her pure and spotless soul fled to join that of the husband she had so fondly, truly loved, leaving their helpless child as a mournful legacy to the pity of Mr. Manvers, the only sincere friend its unhappy parents had ever known. He was faithful to the trust, and having attended their cold remains to a neighbouring cemetery with every observance of respect, and *seen them* interred in one grave, he took the orphan to his house,

where, provided with all comfort, she was tended with as much care as if she had been his own child. When old enough to receive tuition she was sent to an excellent school, it being the intention of her benefactor that she should be brought up as a governess.

To render her fit for this situation, no expence was saved, and during the years that intervened ere she was deemed sufficiently accomplished to instruct others, she continued to have every kindness lavished on her by her generous friend and his family. When arrived at an age to comprehend her position, (I trust my readers will permit me to avoid the egotistical *I*, and write of myself as if I wrote of another,) Mr. Manvers revealed to her the particulars of the sad story, and premature deaths of her parents. He painted in bright and unfading colours, the virtues and misfortunes of the amiable and ill-fated pair. He loved to dwell on every detail connected with them, that brought forth more strikingly their virtues and noble qualities; and while doing so, the history of their wrongs, all of which were well known to him, was exposed to her. The heartlessness, and utter selfishness of those among whom the destiny of her father had been cast, filled her mind with disgust and dread, but it also strengthened and steeled it against the illusions to which youth is prone.

At an age when young girls see only the bright side of life, she was impressed with a conviction that the heirs of poverty are born to endure many and heavy trials; and that fortitude and resignation, which can alone enable them to support such evils, must be assiduously cultivated, as a spirit of discontent and repining will but increase the sense of them.

The same fatal disease that had snatched away the wife of Mr. Manvers, deprived him of his children, when they had become old enough to be his friends, as well as companions. It was on these trying occasions that the orphan he had protected was enabled to prove most strongly her gratitude and devotion. She nursed the sick with unwearying attention and tenderness, and soothed the bereaved father when his offspring were taken from him, with *an assiduity* which, if it could not heal the deep wounds

inflicted on his peace, served at least to mitigate his sense of their anguish.

Fortune, that blind goddess, who seems to delight in persecuting those least able to resist her shafts, and who had so sternly frowned on her parents, had reserved some of her arrows to pierce the orphan they had left behind, and that too when her only friend, the worthy Mr. Manvers, was on the point of securing to her a provision, that would have precluded her from ever experiencing the ills that wait on poverty. Having amassed a large fortune, and no longer blessed with those dear objects for whom he had laboured to acquire it, he determined on bequeathing it to her whom he had befriended. His only near relative was a sister, whose character and conduct were so dissimilar to his own, as to have produced a long and serious estrangement between them. Her extravagance had often involved her in difficulties, from the consequences of which he had several times extricated her, at the cost of heavy pecuniary sacrifices, but his kindness had failed to make a proper impression on her callous heart. He had discovered her ingratitude, and although determined to make a provision that would secure her from want when he should be no more, he, in the warmth of his generous affection, thought his wealth could nowhere be so well bestowed as on the young girl whose attention to his lost offspring, and devotion to himself, had won his regard. He had immediately after the death of her parents added a codicil to his will, bequeathing the sum of two thousand pounds to her. He now determined to destroy this will, and to replace it by another; but the very day he had consigned it to the flames, and gone to his solicitor to give him instructions to prepare another, he found that gentleman had been called into the country, and was not expected to return for some days. "Let me know when he arrives," said Mr. Manvers to the clerk, "for I have business of some importance to consult him on," and he walked away from Lincoln's Inn, his mind filled by the thought of securing his large fortune to the person he most regarded. That evening he made notes of instruction for the drawing of his will, in which an annuity of two hundred a year was to be bequeathed to *his sister;* half that sum to his worthy housekeeper, a consider-

able provision to his confidential clerk, and donations to all his other clerks and domestics whose services had entitled them to his esteem. To the orphan was the remainder of his wealth, amounting to no less a sum than sixty thousand pounds, to revert, and he named two of his most respected friends as executors. He signed the sheet of paper on which he had written these notes, and having placed it on his desk, intending to lock it up next morning, retired to his pillow that night with a mind at rest, satisfied at having taken steps to put into execution an intention formed ever since the death of his second daughter. With more virtues than fall to the lot of most men, Mr. Manvers had one defect, that was a superstitious dread connected with making his will. He thought that death was less likely to visit him while he had made no testamentary arrangement of his affairs; and this weakness, which he hardly acknowledged to himself, had led him from month to month to postpone making a new one. To conquer this disposition to procrastination, of the weakness of which he felt sensible, he had taken the step of committing the will made during the life of his daughter to the flames, and the very next day had gone to his solicitor's to have a new one drawn up in due form. But the truth of the proverb, that "Man proposes, and God disposes," was never more exemplified than in his case; for he never awoke from the sleep into which he fell the night after he had written his notes relative to his will; that calm slumber, before dropping into which, his last thought had been one of self-satisfaction at having, as he thought, so well disposed of his honestly acquired wealth.

CHAPTER XIII.

The next morning, about the hour which Mr. Manvers generally left his chamber, his sister called to seek an interview with him, for the purpose of soliciting pecuniary aid; having, as was her wont, exceeded the quarterly stipend he assigned for her support. She was informed that he had not yet descended, and was shown into a private room at the back of his shop, where he was in the habit of receiving people on business. She had not remained *more than a quarter* of an hour there, when the shrieks

of the housemaid, who rushed down stairs, struck her ear, and hearing the shocked and grief-stricken woman announce to the housekeeper that their dear, their good master was no more, she hurried up to his chamber, and found her brother a corse! She glanced around; for even the awful sight before her failed to touch her cold and callous heart; and her eyes fell on the paper on the desk near his bedside. In a moment she became conscious of its importance, and seizing it with the rapidity of lightning, she conveyed it to her pocket before the housekeeper and confidential clerk of the deceased could reach the chamber; and then throwing herself on the bed, and clasping the lifeless body in her arms, she so well simulated a paroxysm of despair and anguish, as to excite the commiseration of those present, although they had previously felt ill-disposed towards her, from knowing the chagrin and trouble she had so frequently inflicted on their departed friend and master. A surgeon who had been sent for on the first alarm, now arrived, and pronounced that life had been for several hours extinct. Mr. Vernon, the head clerk, in the presence of the surgeon, placed seals on all the desks, drawers, &c., and despatched messengers to the two friends who his late employer had told him were to be his executors.

Mr. Manvers had informed him some time previously, of his intention to bequeath the principal portion of his fortune to the orphan. The worthy housekeeper had likewise been told this by her master, so both now regarded the young girl as the heiress to his wealth; and, having known and loved her since her infancy, they had a satisfaction in her good fortune.

Mrs. Forsythe, the sister of the deceased, so well enacted her *rôle*, as to impose on all present, and convince them that she was a prey to grief. Force was necessary to remove her from the lifeless body of her brother, and so wholly overwhelmed by grief did she appear to be, that the humane and worthy housekeeper proposed having a bed made for her in an adjoining chamber, she having declared, with a frantic vehemence of tenderness, that she would not be denied the sad consolation of remaining near his corse until it was to be removed for ever from her sight.

Having carried her point of remaining on the spot, and watch-

ing that nothing was removed, — for Mrs. Forsythe to her other bad qualities united a degree of suspicion rarely found but in those who, capable themselves of every turpitude, are prone to attribute similar dispositions to all with whom they come in contact, she swallowed a calming potion, prescribed by the surgeon, and being left alone to try the efficacy of its effect, drew the paper signed by her late brother from its concealment, and carefully perused its contents. The writing and paper looked so fresh, and the circumstance, too, of its laying *on* the desk, with the pen still in the inkbottle by its side, struck her as proofs that the document in her hand had only been indited the previous night, before her brother had sought that pillow whence it was decreed by the Almighty that he was to rise no more. She trembled with emotion as the possibility that this might be his only testamentary disposition occurred to her; and a thrill of joy and triumph passed through her mind at the thought that it was secure in her possession, and unknown to any one else. Oh, if it should prove to be so! If no other will could be found among his papers, or at his solicitor's, how might she benefit by having discovered and secreted it! How fortunate was it that she had been urged by want to visit the deceased that morning; that she was on the spot at the identical time; had been the first to enter his chamber, or at least that side of it where his writing-desk stood, and had time to hide the important paper. Yes, if no will could be found she — she, the sister he disliked, the object of his charity, who had come that very morning to crave a further extension of it, ashamed to meet his cold glance and reproachful eye at this new proof of her improvidence! Yes, she would, in default of a will being found, become the natural heiress to all his wealth, and his *protégée*, Miss Stratford, for whom he intended to defraud her, his nearest relation, his own sister, would be left a dependent on the bounty of *her* whom probably she had been taught to undervalue, if not to despise! Oh! there was happiness in the very thought of attaining the wealth her heart had long pined for, and of which she had so often envied her brother the possession! *She* would not, like him, toil on to increase the ample store he had amassed. No, she would make it minister to those gratifications of which she had but too long

been deprived; she would revel in those luxuries and pleasures she longed to enjoy; and the wealth, for the attainment of which he had so strictly attended to business for years, and denied himself so many indulgences, she, yes, she whom he had reprehended, and to whom he had doled out a stinted stipend, would reap the benefit of all his parsimony and industry. And the heartless woman smiled in triumphant anticipation of those riches she hoped to enjoy.

But if a former will had not been destroyed! Ah! there was the rub; and she trembled as the possibility of this again crossed her mind. She determined that she would continue to enact the *rôle* of a mourning sister, so successfully commenced, excite the good-will and sympathy of those around her, who entertained so deep a respect for her departed brother; so that in case her worst fears were realized by the existence of a will, she might, by conciliating the good opinion of the legatee, or legatees, derive some pecuniary advantage from them. She controlled herself sufficiently to appear wholly absorbed in grief, and so well did she play her part, that she succeeded in duping the worthy individuals who had an opportunity of witnessing her assumed chagrin.

The result is soon told. No will could be found. Selina Stratford was left without any provision; and Mrs. Forsythe, the cold, calculating, and selfish Mrs. Forsythe, became the inheritress of the large fortune of her brother.

No sooner was it ascertained that Mrs. Forsythe was indeed the legal inheritress of her brother's fortune, than she threw off the mask of grief she had previously assumed, and boldly asserted her rights. She demanded an exact account of the possessions that had devolved on her, left no drawer or desk unsearched, no closet unexplored; examined every room, and every piece of furniture in each, and found with delight that the wealth, which was now her own, far exceeded her most sanguine expectations. She looked with a suspicion, which she had not the delicacy to conceal, on the head clerk, a man of the strictest probity, repeatedly told him he must render an exact account of his late master's affairs, and insulted the old housekeeper, the tried and faithful servant in whom Mr. Manvers had placed implicit confidence, by finding fault

with the household arrangements, and declaring her intention of changing the whole system.

The orphan had been summoned from the establishment in Sloane-street, where she had, during the last twelve years, resided as a parlour boarder, to come and visit the cold remains of her friend and benefactor, and had arrived at his abode soon after the melancholy intelligence of his death had reached her. Looked on by the head clerk and housekeeper as the person who was to inherit their late master's fortune, they were anxious that she should remain in the house, and received her with every demonstration of respect. They knew that her grief was heartfelt, and deeply sympathized in it. Mrs. Forsythe treated her with a fawning attention during the first two or three days, calculating that, should a will be found, and that the orphan was to be the heiress of her brother, it would be politic to conciliate her good will, in the hope that it might lead to an addition to whatever provision Mr. Manvers might have assigned for her. That it would be a small one, she entertained no doubt, and, consequently, she was desirous of profiting by any change that offered to increase it. Her flattery was so fulsome and unacceptable to the orphan, that it required a lively recollection of the benefits received from Mr. Manvers, and a warm sense of gratitude for them, to make her tolerate his sister, whose manners and tone were so dissimilar to her own, as to render her society anything but agreeable to her. When, however, the fact of Mrs. Forsythe being the heiress to her brother's possessions was made known, that person soon changed her manner towards the *protégée* of her brother; her fulsome adulation was turned to an insolent *brusquerie* still more insupportable, and she reminded the poor girl of her dependent position, with a coarseness so absolutely revolting, that Selina left the house where she had never previously experienced aught save kindness and affection, evinced with a delicacy that enhanced the value of both.

She returned to the establishment in Sloane-street, where she had resided as a parlour boarder, determined to solicit the assistance of the Mesdames Patterson to procure her a situation as governess. The change in her position had already been made known to them, for Mrs. Forsythe, with a malice and littleness of

mind peculiar to her, had written them a letter, stating that the girl whom her brother had foolishly brought up, and educated as if she were a lady, was now left a beggar; and that *she*, being sole possessor of his wealth, must decline making so bad a use of it, as to allow any portion to be wasted in paying any arrears due to them. It happened unfortunately that a quarter's salary had fallen due two days after the death of Mr. Manvers, and as the sum was no less a one than fifty pounds, that generous man having, to ensure the comfort of his ward, agreed to pay the liberal allowance of two hundred per annum for her board and lodging, the intelligence conveyed by his sister occasioned no very agreeable surprise in the establishment in Sloane-street.

The Mesdames Patterson were elderly maiden ladies, who, after having struggled during the commencement of their career as teachers through many and heavy pecuniary difficulties, found themselves, after twenty years employed in tuition, in a state of comparative affluence, less the fruit of their industry than the consequence of the rigid system of economy in which they had persevered. They demanded large remuneration from their pupils, and fed them so frugally, that the children consigned to the tender mercies of a poor-house were not more sparingly dieted than the young ladies in their establishment. The difference was, the first were served on delf, pewter, or tin, on huckaback; the second on delicate china or plate, on snowy damask. All breakage by the servants was charged in the quarterly accounts to the young ladies, and though the parents might murmur at the extravagance of such charges, the Mesdames Patterson would not abate one shilling of them, saying, that in their establishment they permitted nothing but the very best china and glass to be used, and the breakage must be paid for.

The sum thus mulcted, amounted to no inconsiderable one at the close of each year, and the young ladies of the Misses Patterson's establishment were compelled to console themselves for the damaged, bohea tea, bought at half-price, the adulterated cocoa and chocolate, the coarse sugar, rancid butter, pale-blue milk, and stale household bread, supplied for their morning and evening repasts, by the *recherché* elegance of the damask, china,

, and glass, on which they were served. The paucity of the rs, and bad quality of the low-priced viands, the Misses rson thought were amply atoned for by the irreproachable nce of the dinner service. And even this elegance became a e of profit instead of cost to the establishment, for each ; lady was expected to bring a silver teapot, cream-ewer, ugar-basin, half-a-dozen silver forks, and spoons, with a dish, which, on their leaving the school, were to become roperty of the Mesdames Patterson. Thus these ladies, at piration of a few years, found themselves the owners of an sive assortment of plate, which went on accumulating every the charges for keeping which in repair were regularly ed in the accounts of the pupils.

was a subject of general remark and commendation, that oung ladies of the Misses Patterson's establishment had r complexions, and slighter waists, than those of any other; ere much less frequently attacked by inflammatory com- ts. With such advantages, what parent could listen to the sentations of her daughter, on the paucity or quality of her even if young ladies were prone to make such. But that confided to the Mesdames Patterson were not so disposed, ot surprise our readers, when we add, that few young ladies received by them until they had entered their thirteenth year s being what is termed a finishing school); a period of life at *les démoiselles* begin to be extremely sensible of the ad- ges of a clear complexion and slight waist, and are willing to it to a spare diet to secure them. To orphans, rich enough r the large remuneration required, the maiden sisters, when education was finished, offered a home, as parlour boarders; mong these, Selina Stratford had been placed. She now ned, believing (so ignorant was she of the world) that she d receive kindness and commiseration, under her present tion, from the Misses Patterson. Her reception was a very ent one to that on which she counted. They listened to her unmoved countenances, although her words were often inter- d by tears, and when she had concluded, told her that a

letter from Mrs. Forsythe had made them perfectly aware of her position.

"When we received you into this house," said the senior of the Misses Patterson, "we were wholly ignorant that you were a dependent on the charity of a grocer. We demurred about receiving a pupil placed by a person in that station of life, having always made it a rule to accept only young ladies of good family. Indeed, we carefully concealed from our other pupils, and their parents, that *the* Mr. Manvers who placed you here, and paid your bills, was no other than the tradesman who probably served them with all the articles in his trade. But to find ourselves taken in, defrauded, as it were, out of our just claims — you are aware, Miss Stratford, that one quarter's salary became due a week ago, and that another quarter has commenced, and also that the rules of our house are, that a quarter's notice of leaving should be given, or the salary paid in advance — is really too bad. It was shameful of Mr. Manvers not to have made arrangements that *we* should be paid, when we had departed so far from our established rules as to receive a young person who had no other recommendation to our notice than his. Yes, it was most dishonourable, I must say."

Selina Stratford, confounded and indignant at hearing such reproaches uttered against her benefactor, whose name had never previously been pronounced by the Mesdames Patterson unaccompanied by praises of his generosity, liberality, and punctuality, stood amazed and silent. Frequent had been the presents, graciously offered, and thankfully accepted, from Mr. Manvers to the Misses Patterson, of cases of superior tea, Greek honey, dried fruits, and sweetmeats, with other dainties peculiar to his craft, given to induce these starch and somewhat haughty dames to show favour and kindness to his *protégée*. Nor were these *cadeaux* unavailing; for these ladies had often declared, that from none of the friends or parents of their pupils had they received such constant and useful gifts, as from the guardian of Miss Stratford; and their smiles and indulgence to her having been meted out in proportion, she had, with the confidence of youth and inexperience, fully calculated that now, in her hour of need, they

would not desert her. She counted on being received by them until they could hear of a situation for her as governess, in which their recommendation could place her. Their harsh words and altered mien convinced her that she had been greatly in error when she built her hopes on so unstable a foundation as their good-will; and as this conviction forced itself on her mind tears filled her eyes — less the result of selfish regret at the probable consequences to herself, than at discovering the unworthiness of those of whom she had hitherto entertained a favourable opinion. The first lessons in the school of adversity are ever acquired with pain, and this pain is always in proportion to the native goodness of the scholar. Selina Stratford felt how differently *she* would have acted in similar circumstances, and this consciousness of a better nature rendered her regret more acute, her indignation more lively.

"Brought up in the principles of probity that govern this house, you cannot, surely, help feeling, Miss Stratford, that *we* ought not to be losers by our misplaced confidence in Mr. Manvers," resumed the elder Miss Patterson. "He was liberal in his allowance of pocket money to you; indeed more so than was right, considering your dependent position, and his shameful neglect in not providing for you. He made you presents, too, of considerable value, and you cannot, surely, have idly expended the money you received?"

"I have still some by me, Madam," replied Selina.

"Then you will have but little profited by the instruction received beneath this roof, if you can hesitate a moment in appropriating every shilling you possess towards paying, as far as it will go, for the quarter due to us by your late friend. Your watch, trinkets, best clothes, India shawl, and books, will help to defray our account, and, although we shall still be heavy losers, we cannot blame you, provided you give up, as you are in common honesty bound to do, all that you possess."

"Yes, this will be only fair; and my sister and I show our kindness and forbearance to you, in pointing out how you may clear yourself from debt," observed the junior Miss Patterson, assuming a bland air.

"I accede, at once, to your proposal, Madam," replied Selina, "and hope that, in return for my willingness to give up all I possess, you will kindly use your influence to procure me a situation as governess — my sole chance of subsistence, henceforth."

"Certainly, if we should hear of any person wanting a governess, we will think of you, but I fear it will not be very likely.

"People begin to find out that private education, carried on beneath the parental roof, is attended with so many disadvantages, that they prefer sending their children to establishments like ours. A teacher at a school will be the object to which your wishes must point, as being the one most attainable; but bear in mind, the salaries given are so small, that it will require the utmost prudence and economy on your part, to enable you to clothe yourself with the respectability expected in such establishments."

"Might I be permitted to remain here until some such situation offers?" inquired Selina, her cheeks suffused with red, at being compelled to make this first appeal to the charity of her fellow-creatures.

The sisters looked at each other, and then, after a moment's pause, the elder replied, that provided Miss Stratford would fulfil the duties of a teacher, in return for her board and lodging, they would not object to her remaining until something offered for her.

"But," added Miss Patterson, "you must be aware that your position here necessarily becomes wholly altered. You must leave the chamber you have hitherto occupied, and share the room and bed of Miss Waterhouse. You must be unremitting in your exertions to perform your duty, and merit our approval, in return for the heavy expense we entail on ourselves in allowing you to remain here."

"Yes," said the junior Miss Patterson, "your board and lodging will be a serious expense; but our humanity and good-nature induce us to sacrifice our own interest for the sake of advancing yours, and I trust you will know how to estimate the favour. You can devote your leisure hours in the evening to mending the house linen, and doing any little plain work my sister or I may have *occasion* for. By the bye, I have just now some under-petticoats to

e made, which I will have sent to you. Miss Waterhouse is a eady industrious girl, who never spares her labour, is ready to ne a hand to any thing, and never gives trouble to the servants. ou will do well to follow her example in all things, and, above all, the humility for which she is so conspicuous."

Selina listened in silence to the sisters, confounded by a sense her own dependent position. She knew not what to do, — had friend to turn to for counsel or protection, — and although she as aware that to accept the offer made by the Mesdames Patterson ould be to expose herself to the labour, without the wages of a rvant, she thought that even this would be better, than to go forth one and unprotected to seek a home and employment to support r in it. She thanked the sisters, and said that for the present e would avail herself of their offer.

CHAPTER XIV.

"It is advisable that no time should be lost in transferring the oney and articles which we are to have in part payment of the m due to us," observed Miss Patterson, after a short pause and whispering consultation with her sister. "Mind, I say in part yment; for of course all you possess would go but a very short y indeed towards discharging your debt; and I fully expect that hen you get a situation, with a salary attached to it, you will propriate three parts of it to discharging in full the amount due us."

"That will be only fair," said the junior sister, "and Miss ratford cannot object to it."

Miss Patterson accompanied Selina to her chamber, and stood ering into each drawer as it was opened. "Let me have the oney first!" exclaimed she, reaching eagerly at the note-case d purse which were in a corner of the desk, and clutching them her grasp. "Are you sure that you have no more elsewhere? — one in your pocket?"

"Only a few shillings, Madam," replied Selina.

"Let me see."

The orphan *drew a purse* from her pocket, and its contents,

amounting to some fifteen or sixteen shillings, were counted over by Miss Patterson, who, having ascertained the precise sum, was about to replace it in the purse again, and to transfer it to her own pocket, when Selina ventured to say, "Pardon me, but I should not like to part with that purse. It was the gift of my kind friend, Mr. Manvers."

"Oh! you may keep it, if you set such a store by it," and Miss Patterson threw, rather than handed back the empty purse; "but your kind friend, as you are pleased to call him, would have done better in leaving you something to keep you in bread hereafter, than in foolishly supplying you with more pocket-money than you wanted; which has induced a habit of extravagance greatly to be deplored in a person in your dependent situation."

"You will oblige me, Madam, by sparing all reflections on the memory of my best friend," said Selina, and tears filled her eyes.

"You must conquer this irritability, if you intend to thrive in this or any other establishment you may enter," observed Miss Patterson. "It will be a great obstacle to you through life, I can assure you. Let me see how much gold there is in that other purse, and what notes there are in the pocket-book."

She waited not for Selina to count the money, but did so herself; and then, having ascertained that the note-case was empty, she possessed herself of the gold, some seventeen or eighteen sovereigns, and then turned her attention to the wardrobe.

"You will not require these coloured silk dresses," observed she. "Black, or very dark brown, are the colours most suitable to a governess. I thought your shawl was better, but I find it is only a low-priced one. You lately bought some new linen and stockings, I have heard; that was a piece of extravagance, but they will suit me," and she counted over the said articles. "Are these all your trinkets? Surely I have seen you wear some others!"

"I assure you, Madam, these are all I possess."

"Well, but you need not cry about it, child. Really you must conquer this habit of shedding tears on every occasion. It will *never* do. Have you not another gold chain, a smaller one?"

, Madam, one I always wear; which has a locket at-
vith the hair of my parents."
lack ribbon will answer quite as well, and be more
o your altered circumstances; so give me the chain."
unsteady fingers Selina drew the chain from her neck;
ing unfastened it from the locket, consigned it to the
Miss Patterson, who then shamelessly reminded her
ad not taken off a ring.
that ring I cannot, will not, part from!" exclaimed
ortured beyond the power of further endurance: "That
edding ring of my mother!"
atch, with its chain and seals, was next demanded, and
of her property, except two or three of her worst gowns,
other indispensable articles, being delivered up to the
l avaricious woman who so unblushingly seized them,
in was left to remove her now scanty wardrobe to the
attic she was henceforth to share with the much-
Miss Waterhouse.
ng could be more cheerless than this wretched chamber.
at Selina could not stand upright, save in its centre, it
ed by a small window, precisely in front of which, a
himnies protruded so closely, as nearly to intercept the
ing the room the air of a prison. Three iron bars, to
the possibility of ingress or egress, strengthened the
nce, which the paucity and quality of the furniture was
lated to destroy. A deal table, very unsteady on its
od before the window, and a cracked looking-glass of
nensions graced it. A wretched looking bed, with a
ed counterpane and curtains, two ricketty chairs, a
asin and jug, and an empty pomatum-pot, completed
its of this wretched chamber; and a few of the robes of
terhouse, suspended on wooden pegs from the wall,
he dreariness of its aspect.
previously had Selina ascended to this portion of the
of the Misses Patterson, or imagined that aught so
and poverty-stricken could be found beneath a roof
by persons in easy, if not in affluent circumstances.

She shuddered as she contemplated the room, and contrasted it with the clean and cheerful one she had hitherto occupied, and inwardly prayed that she might not long be doomed to be an inmate of this dark and dingy attic. She recoiled with a sentiment of distaste, she could neither vanquish nor wholly conceal, as she looked at the dirty curtains beneath which she was to share the bed of Miss Waterhouse, and felt that she would infinitely prefer sleeping alone on the boards, to such companionship.

Miss Patterson, observing her emotion, and justly interpreting its cause, said, "You need not be alarmed about the bed. It is a very good one, I assure you. Excellent feathers, and a good straw paillasse under. I never heard the least complaint of it, and Miss Waterhouse has now occupied it for three years, so it is well aired."

Selina made no reply, and Miss Patterson withdrew, leaving her to reflect on her altered position, and all the disagreeable consequences it entailed.

A servant, in a few minutes after, announced to her that an elderly gentleman wished to see her; and handing her a card, she read with satisfaction the name of Mr. Vernon, the senior clerk of her late friend Mr. Manvers. She hastened down stairs to receive him, and forgetful for the moment of her altered position in the establishment of the Mesdames Patterson, was on the point of entering the sitting-room formerly assigned to her use, and where she had been in the habit of receiving Mr. Manvers, when the servant laid hold of her dress, and said, "Miss, Miss, you must not go in there any more. Missus told me not to let you, now as you are hired as a teacher to help Miss Waterhouse."

The blood rushed to the brows of the orphan at this address; but a moment's reflection taught her that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the poverty that exposed her to such annoyances, and with a calm demeanour she inquired of the servant where she could receive Mr. Vernon?

"Here in the hall, Miss, if you please, where Miss Waterhouse sees her friends when they call. The old gentleman is *a-waiting outside* the door, as I didn't like to let him stop in the *hall till I* knew whether he really was a friend of yours, there are

so many rogues going about with false excuses, and there 's always a stray umbrella or so lying about, which they walk off with, if they can lay their hands on nothing else. You see, Miss, there 's two or three nice clean chairs here; so the old gentleman and you can sit down and have a bit of chat; but hush, Miss," and here the woman bent close to the ear of Selina, "mind you don't speak loud; for the old 'uns are very 'quisitive, and will be trying to listen to what you say. But mum 's the word; I 'd lose my place, if they suspected I put you on your guard."

"Let in the gentleman, if you please," said Selina, and in the next moment Mr. Vernon stood before her.

After a cordial greeting, he turned and said, "I wish to speak to you, Miss Stratford."

"I am sorry I have no room to receive you in," replied Selina, "so our conversation must take place here."

"What, so soon!" muttered Mr. Vernon. "I did not think that you would already, my dear young lady, have experienced the effect of altered circumstances. I expected better things from the Mesdames Patterson. I came for the purpose of inviting you to take up your abode at my humble home for the present. My wife will be proud and happy to receive you; and be assured that whatever our poor house may want in elegance, you shall find no deficiency in the cordiality and sincerity of our welcome. Since I have seen the effect produced here by our recent affliction, I am doubly anxious that you should seek a home with my wife; so let me implore you to accept at once our invitation, and let me conduct you to my house."

The warmth and kindness with which the invitation was urged, and a recollection of the squalid chamber and bed, to be shared with Miss Waterhouse, decided Selina to accept it. She requested an interview with the Mesdames Patterson, communicated to them her intention of immediately leaving their establishment, and solicited their recommendation to procure her a situation as governess in a private family.

"Really you must excuse our doing any such thing," replied the senior of the sisters. "Leaving our house in such a sudden, I may say, such a *mysterious* manner, at a moment's notice,

has a very strange appearance, to say the least of it. I cannot help thinking that you make a very ungrateful return, — yes, a very ungrateful return, indeed, for our great kindness in offering to maintain you, after the heavy loss we have sustained by you; and as you choose to leave our house, and throw yourself on the protection of Heaven knows who ——"

"Pardon me, Madam, for interrupting you. I am going to the house of one of my oldest friends, of one who has known me from my infancy, Mr. Vernon, the senior clerk of my late friend Mr. Manvers."

"Then you may look to him for a recommendation; for I repeat, *we* shall certainly not permit any reference to be made to us, and we desire to hear or see nothing more of a person who has proved so ungrateful."

Selina hastened to the wretched chamber where her now scanty wardrobe had been deposited; and having had it removed down stairs, she entered the hackney-coach which Mr. Vernon had called to the door, and accompanied by him, was driven off to his house.

The good man looked surprised, when, in answer to his question of whether the small box in the coach contained all her property, she told him of the seizure made of all her valuables and clothes by the Mesdames Patterson.

"How I rejoice that I have taken you away from such heartless and selfish women!" said he. "My wife blamed me for not having at once requested you, to make a home with us; but the truth is, I expected to the last that Mrs. Forsythe would offer you an asylum with her, or at least make some provision for you; and seeing the dislike and unjust suspicions she entertained towards me, I feared that were we to take you at once to our humble abode, it might prejudice her against you, and prevent her serving you. As, however, she has declared that she will do nothing for you, there is no longer any good to be accomplished by my wife and I holding back from proving to you the affection and *respect* we entertain. We feel that we cannot better show our *gratitude to* our departed friend and benefactor than by endeavouring *to befriend* one he so truly loved. But here we are at home.

y the manner in which he met his charming and suffering wife fter a separation of so many weeks.

"How are you, Frances? Much as usual, I suppose; always iling, or at least always complaining;" and he took the trembling ittle hand that was extended to him, and just touched the brow of is wife with his lips. He stared rudely at Selina, but without owing or showing any of the usual observances which men show o women in similar circumstances. Lady Almondbury quickly oticed this want of respect towards her favourite, and hastened o name her, saying, "This young lady is Miss Stratford, whom wrote to you about."

"Oh, Adelaide's governess, is it? Then I pity her, for by upiter she will have anything but a pleasant time with that tire- ome troublesome girl, unless she rules her with a firm hand."

Lady Almondbury changed colour, and her eyes filled with ears, which she turned her head to conceal, but her husband had oticed them, and there was something brutal in the mode in hich he evinced his recognition of his wife's wounded feelings.

"What! tears!" exclaimed he, "and all because I speak my ind about Adelaide, who, you must confess, is the most isagreeable girl in the world."

Anxious to change the subject, Lady Almondbury, with an ffort to control her emotion, that merited a better reward than he could hope from her tyrannical lord and master, expressed a ope that he had enjoyed his sojourn in Scotland, and had good port.

"Devilish bad, I can tell you; but that was owing to my being uch a fool as to have taken two fellows with me, who are as good hots as myself, and who consequently destroyed more game than expected. I asked them, merely to have some one to talk to in ie evenings, in case I did not fall asleep; but never again will I ike a fellow who is a good shot — that I 'm determined on. What 's going on in town? But what 's the use of asking you? dare say you know no more than Adelaide, probably less, for he most likely hears the gossip of the servants."

"Miss Stratford will guard against that evil," observed Lady lmondbury.

"I must go and have some dinner, and, as usual, I dare say I shall have a devilish bad one; but that is sure to be the case when the mistress of a house is sickly and lives on slops. Now it 's quite a pleasure to dine at Merlingham's or Oxenford's; for their wives are epicures, and understand the merits of a good *cuisine;* while you, Frances," and he glanced contemptuously towards his wife, "can appreciate nothing beyond a boiled chicken, a *consommé*, or some similarly insipid food for invalids."

When Lord Almondbury left the room, a silence of some duration ensued. It was evident that his wife was pained and embarrassed, and when she spoke it was to attempt some excuse for him.

"Men, and particularly those blessed with strong constitutions," observed Lady Almondbury, "are prone to dislike sick rooms, if not sick people; it is but natural," and a deep sigh followed the admission, "for those to whom illness is a stranger cannot make allowance for the infirmities of invalids, or the privations and constraint to which they must submit."

Selina did not venture to reply, but she thought that hard indeed must be the heart, and unkind the nature of him, whose conduct drew from his fair and gentle wife this attempt to excuse it; but in proportion as her bad opinion of him increased did her high one of Lady Almondbury become more firmly established. Her patience and resignation under severe physical suffering, unrelieved, too, by the affection or attention of him who ought to have endeavoured to lighten her sense of them, created the liveliest interest, joined to the most profound respect for her, in the heart of Selina, who devoted herself, with unceasing care, not only to the discharge of her duty towards her pupil, but to render the confinement of Lady Almondbury less irksome and dull than it had hitherto been, and endeavoured to amuse and interest the lonely valetudinarian, and, above all, delighted her by drawing forth in her presence proofs of the rapid progress made by Lady Adelaide, whose natural cleverness, and facility in acquiring knowledge, was really most gratifying.

The first time Selina was present at an interview between Lord

Almondbury and his daughter which took place in the boudoir of Lady Almondbury, she was surprised, and, truth to say, shocked, at the want of natural affection on both sides. The father only nodded to the child, and she in return merely made him a formal curtsey.

"Go and kiss papa, my dear," said the fond mother timidly.

"I beg to be excused," was the hard speech of the father. "I have no pleasure in being kissed by children, and above all when the mark of affection is commanded, and not spontaneous."

"Adelaide would, I am sure, be glad to embrace you, if you would encourage her a little," remarked Lady Almondbury timidly.

"Do you wish to kiss me, young lady?" demanded the unnatural parent, with a most forbidding scowl.

"No," replied the child; "you never wish to kiss *me*, and so I don't want to kiss *you*."

"Adelaide, my dear," said Lady Almondbury; "you should not —"

"What! would you make the girl false?" exclaimed the father angrily. "If she has one good quality in her perverse nature — that of speaking the truth — why should you wish to destroy it?"

"You mistake; indeed you do," said the mother; "you check all your child's advances by your sternness towards her; but, be assured, it only requires a little kindness to make her love you as fondly as she does me."

"Do you love me?" demanded Lord Almondbury, again looking sternly at the little girl.

"No, I don't," was the honest reply.

"Well, I like you for your frankness, for I hate hypocrisy and fawning," was the ungracious observation.

"You would be pleased to see the progress Adelaide has made in her studies since she has had the advantage of being under Miss Stratford's care," said Lady Almondbury.

"Oh! spare me the exhibition," exclaimed Lord Almondbury; "the bare notion sets me yawning!" and, suiting the action to the word, he opened his mouth to its utmost extent, and stretched his arms. "*Nothing* bores me so much as when mothers take it

into their heads to show off their children, who, examined by their teachers, repeat their lessons by rote, like parrots, and understand them as little."

Lady Almondbury sighed, but did not attempt to reason with her husband. She too well knew the utter uselessness of such a measure, but her silence offended her tyrant almost as much as words would have done, for he arose and left the room, muttering something about "persons who set themselves up as martyrs, in order to excite commiseration."

When the door closed after him, Lady Adelaide rushed to her mother, and fondly embraced her.

"Dear, darling mamma," exclaimed the affectionate girl, "how I do love you and hate papa!"

"Adelaide, how you shock, how you distress me! Do you not know that it is most sinful, most wicked, for a child not to love its father?"

"But papa does not love *me* the least bit, indeed he doesn't, dear mamma; and how can I love him, when he doesn't love me?"

"Because it is your duty, Adelaide; how often have I told you this, and repeated to you the deep pain you inflict on me by not showing a proper affection to your father!"

"I 'm very sorry to give *you* pain, dear kind mamma; but I don't know what to do. You tell me, and so does dear Miss Stratford, that I must always speak the truth. Now, if I say I love papa, it will not be the truth; and, though I try all I can to love him, I can't; indeed I can't, mamma!" and the child's eyes filled with tears, and she hid her face in her mother's bosom.

"You will turn your attention to this point," said Lady Almondbury to Selina in Italian. "It is true, and I deeply regret it; Lord Almondbury does not like children, and least of all girls. He was greatly disappointed when this dear child was born; he wished for a boy; most, if not all, men do; and he has never quite got over the disappointment. Point out to my poor Adelaide her duty; make her understand that she is to conciliate her father *by every* means in her power, for the first wish of my heart is, —

knowing how precarious my life is, on how frail a thread it depends, — is to see a mutual affection spring up where it is so natural it should be. How terrible will it be for my poor child, when I am taken from her, to find neither consolation nor affection in her remaining parent!"

Although the little girl did not understand Italian, the mournful expression of her mother's face, and the tremulous movement of her lips, betrayed her agitation, and the little girl surmised her grief; so, clinging fondly to her mother's breast, and looking up in her face she exclaimed, "Ah, dearest mamma! do not look so sad, and I will do anything to please you. Yes, I will try ever so much to love papa; indeed I will, for I can't bear to see you unhappy; indeed I can't!"

A few days after this scene Selina and her pupil were passing through the park, on their route to take their daily walk in Kensington Gardens. They saw Lord Almondbury riding with a distinguished-looking elderly man, who seemed to draw his lordship's attention to them. The carriage passed on, without one sign of recognition from the father to his child, nor did a single smile, on her part, mark Lady Adelaide's notice of her parent.

"What a fine countenance the young lady in your carriage has!" observed the companion of Lord Almondbury.

"Yes," replied he; "she has a very fine face. It is a pity, however, that she happens to be one of the saints — a perfect pattern of propriety and prudence, in the shape of a governess to my daughter."

"But in the governess of one's daughter such peculiarities are surely not to be found fault with!" was the reply.

"Perhaps not always; but there *are* certain positions, and mine is one of them, in which, when a pretty girl is by chance thrown in one's way, without one's having sought her, it would be very agreeable to find that she was neither cold nor prudish."

"I must confess, although I do not pretend to be more severe than most other men, that I think one's sins should never be committed at home, and that the roof beneath which dwell a wife and child should be sacred. To corrupt the morals of the person

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The blood rushed to the brows of the orphan at this address; but a moment's reflection taught her that there was nothing to be ashamed of in the poverty that exposed her to such annoyances, and with a calm demeanour she inquired of the servant where she could receive Mr. Vernon?

"Here in the hall, Miss, if you please, where Miss Waterhouse sees her friends when they call. The old gentleman is *a-waiting* outside the door, as I didn't like to let him stop in the *hall till I* knew whether he really was a friend of yours, there are

so many rogues going about with false excuses, and there 's always a stray umbrella or so lying about, which they walk off with, if they can lay their hands on nothing else. You see, Miss, there 's two or three nice clean chairs here; so the old gentleman and you can sit down and have a bit of chat; but hush, Miss," and here the woman bent close to the ear of Selina, "mind you don't speak loud; for the old 'uns are very 'quisitive, and will be trying to listen to what you say. But mum 's the word; I 'd lose my place, if they suspected I put you on your guard."

"Let in the gentleman, if you please," said Selina, and in the next moment Mr. Vernon stood before her.

After a cordial greeting, he turned and said, "I wish to speak to you, Miss Stratford."

"I am sorry I have no room to receive you in," replied Selina, "so our conversation must take place here."

"What, so soon!" muttered Mr. Vernon. "I did not think that you would already, my dear young lady, have experienced the effect of altered circumstances. I expected better things from the Mesdames Patterson. I came for the purpose of inviting you to take up your abode at my humble home for the present. My wife will be proud and happy to receive you; and be assured that whatever our poor house may want in elegance, you shall find no deficiency in the cordiality and sincerity of our welcome. Since I have seen the effect produced here by our recent affliction, I am doubly anxious that you should seek a home with my wife; so let me implore you to accept at once our invitation, and let me conduct you to my house."

The warmth and kindness with which the invitation was urged, and a recollection of the squalid chamber and bed, to be shared with Miss Waterhouse, decided Selina to accept it. She requested an interview with the Mesdames Patterson, communicated to them her intention of immediately leaving their establishment, and solicited their recommendation to procure her a situation as governess in a private family.

"Really you must excuse our doing any such thing," replied the senior of the sisters. "Leaving our house in such a sudden, I may say, *such a mysterious* manner, at a moment's notice,

has a very strange appearance, to say the least of it. I cannot help thinking that you make a very ungrateful return, — yes, a very ungrateful return, indeed, for our great kindness in offering to maintain you, after the heavy loss we have sustained by you; and as you choose to leave our house, and throw yourself on the protection of Heaven knows who ——"

"Pardon me, Madam, for interrupting you. I am going to the house of one of my oldest friends, of one who has known me from my infancy, Mr. Vernon, the senior clerk of my late friend Mr. Manvers."

"Then you may look to him for a recommendation; for I repeat, *we* shall certainly not permit any reference to be made to us, and we desire to hear or see nothing more of a person who has proved so ungrateful."

Selina hastened to the wretched chamber where her now scanty wardrobe had been deposited; and having had it removed down stairs, she entered the hackney-coach which Mr. Vernon had called to the door, and accompanied by him, was driven off to his house.

The good man looked surprised, when, in answer to his question of whether the small box in the coach contained all her property, she told him of the seizure made of all her valuables and clothes by the Mesdames Patterson.

"How I rejoice that I have taken you away from such heartless and selfish women!" said he. "My wife blamed me for not having at once requested you, to make a home with us; but the truth is, I expected to the last that Mrs. Forsythe would offer you an asylum with her, or at least make some provision for you; and seeing the dislike and unjust suspicions she entertained towards me, I feared that were we to take you at once to our humble abode, it might prejudice her against you, and prevent her serving you. As, however, she has declared that she will do nothing for you, there is no longer any good to be accomplished by my wife and I holding back from proving to you the affection and respect we entertain. We feel that we cannot better show our gratitude to our departed friend and benefactor than by endeavouring to befriend one he so truly loved. But here we are at home.

by the manner in which he met his charming and suffering wife after a separation of so many weeks.

"How are you, Frances? Much as usual, I suppose; always ailing, or at least always complaining;" and he took the trembling little hand that was extended to him, and just touched the brow of his wife with his lips. He stared rudely at Selina, but without bowing or showing any of the usual observances which men show to women in similar circumstances. Lady Almondbury quickly noticed this want of respect towards her favourite, and hastened to name her, saying, "This young lady is Miss Stratford, whom I wrote to you about."

"Oh, Adelaide 's governess, is it? Then I pity her, for by Jupiter she will have anything but a pleasant time with that tiresome troublesome girl, unless she rules her with a firm hand."

Lady Almondbury changed colour, and her eyes filled with tears, which she turned her head to conceal, but her husband had noticed them, and there was something brutal in the mode in which he evinced his recognition of his wife's wounded feelings.

"What! tears!" exclaimed he, "and all because I speak my mind about Adelaide, who, you must confess, is the most disagreeable girl in the world."

Anxious to change the subject, Lady Almondbury, with an effort to control her emotion, that merited a better reward than she could hope from her tyrannical lord and master, expressed a hope that he had enjoyed his sojourn in Scotland, and had good sport.

"Devilish bad, I can tell you; but that was owing to my being such a fool as to have taken two fellows with me, who are as good shots as myself, and who consequently destroyed more game than I expected. I asked them, merely to have some one to talk to in the evenings, in case I did not fall asleep; but never again will I take a fellow who is a good shot — that I 'm determined on. What 's going on in town? But what 's the use of asking you? I dare say you know no more than Adelaide, probably less, for she most likely hears the gossip of the servants."

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"I must go and have some dinner, and, as usual, I dare say I shall have a devilish bad one; but that is sure to be the case when the mistress of a house is sickly and lives on slops. Now it 's quite a pleasure to dine at Merlingham's or Oxenford's; for their wives are epicures, and understand the merits of a good *cuisine;* while you, Frances," and he glanced contemptuously towards his wife, "can appreciate nothing beyond a boiled chicken, a *consommé*, or some similarly insipid food for invalids."

When Lord Almondbury left the room, a silence of some duration ensued. It was evident that his wife was pained and embarrassed, and when she spoke it was to attempt some excuse for him.

"Men, and particularly those blessed with strong constitutions," observed Lady Almondbury, "are prone to dislike sick rooms, if not sick people; it is but natural," and a deep sigh followed the admission, "for those to whom illness is a stranger cannot make allowance for the infirmities of invalids, or the privations and constraint to which they must submit."

Selina did not venture to reply, but she thought that hard indeed must be the heart, and unkind the nature of him, whose conduct drew from his fair and gentle wife this attempt to excuse it; but in proportion as her bad opinion of him increased did her high one of Lady Almondbury become more firmly established. Her patience and resignation under severe physical suffering, unrelieved, too, by the affection or attention of him who ought to have endeavoured to lighten her sense of them, created the liveliest interest, joined to the most profound respect for her, in the heart of Selina, who devoted herself, with unceasing care, not only to the discharge of her duty towards her pupil, but to render the confinement of Lady Almondbury less irksome and dull than it had hitherto been, and endeavoured to amuse and interest the lonely valetudinarian, and, above all, delighted her by drawing forth in her presence proofs of the rapid progress made by Lady Adelaide, whose natural cleverness, and facility in acquiring knowledge, was really most gratifying.

The first time Selina was present at an interview between Lord

Almondbury and his daughter which took place in the boudoir of Lady Almondbury, she was surprised, and, truth to say, shocked, at the want of natural affection on both sides. The father only nodded to the child, and she in return merely made him a formal curtsey.

"Go and kiss papa, my dear," said the fond mother timidly.

"I beg to be excused," was the hard speech of the father. "I have no pleasure in being kissed by children, and above all when the mark of affection is commanded, and not spontaneous."

"Adelaide would, I am sure, be glad to embrace you, if you would encourage her a little," remarked Lady Almondbury timidly.

"Do you wish to kiss me, young lady?" demanded the unnatural parent, with a most forbidding scowl.

"No," replied the child; "you never wish to kiss *me*, and so I don't want to kiss *you*."

"Adelaide, my dear," said Lady Almondbury; "you should not —"

"What! would you make the girl false?" exclaimed the father angrily. "If she has one good quality in her perverse nature — that of speaking the truth — why should you wish to destroy it?"

"You mistake; indeed you do," said the mother; "you check all your child's advances by your sternness towards her; but, be assured, it only requires a little kindness to make her love you as fondly as she does me."

"Do you love me?" demanded Lord Almondbury, again looking sternly at the little girl.

"No, I don't," was the honest reply.

"Well, I like you for your frankness, for I hate hypocrisy and fawning," was the ungracious observation.

"You would be pleased to see the progress Adelaide has made in her studies since she has had the advantage of being under Miss Stratford's care," said Lady Almondbury.

"Oh! spare me the exhibition," exclaimed Lord Almondbury; "the bare notion sets me yawning!" and, suiting the action to the word, he opened his mouth to its utmost extent, and stretched his arms. "*Nothing* bores me so much as when mothers take it

into their heads to show off their children, who, examined by their teachers, repeat their lessons by rote, like parrots, and understand them as little."

Lady Almondbury sighed, but did not attempt to reason with her husband. She too well knew the utter uselessness of such a measure, but her silence offended her tyrant almost as much as words would have done, for he arose and left the room, muttering something about "persons who set themselves up as martyrs, in order to excite commiseration."

When the door closed after him, Lady Adelaide rushed to her mother, and fondly embraced her.

"Dear, darling mamma," exclaimed the affectionate girl, "how I do love you and hate papa!"

"Adelaide, how you shock, how you distress me! Do you not know that it is most sinful, most wicked, for a child not to love its father?"

"But papa does not love *me* the least bit, indeed he doesn't, dear mamma; and how can I love him, when he doesn't love me?"

"Because it is your duty, Adelaide; how often have I told you this, and repeated to you the deep pain you inflict on me by not showing a proper affection to your father!"

"I 'm very sorry to give *you* pain, dear kind mamma; but I don't know what to do. You tell me, and so does dear Miss Stratford, that I must always speak the truth. Now, if I say I love papa, it will not be the truth; and, though I try all I can to love him, I can't; indeed I can't, mamma!" and the child's eyes filled with tears, and she hid her face in her mother's bosom.

"You will turn your attention to this point," said Lady Almondbury to Selina in Italian. "It is true, and I deeply regret it; Lord Almondbury does not like children, and least of all girls. He was greatly disappointed when this dear child was born; he wished for a boy; most, if not all, men do; and he has never quite got over the disappointment. Point out to my poor Adelaide *her duty*; make her understand that she is to conciliate her father *by every means* in her power, for the first wish of my heart is,

knowing how precarious my life is, on how frail a thread it depends, — is to see a mutual affection spring up where it is so natural it should be. How terrible will it be for my poor child, when I am taken from her, to find neither consolation nor affection in her remaining parent!"

Although the little girl did not understand Italian, the mournful expression of her mother's face, and the tremulous movement of her lips, betrayed her agitation, and the little girl surmised her grief; so, clinging fondly to her mother's breast, and looking up in her face she exclaimed, "Ah, dearest mamma! do not look so sad, and I will do anything to please you. Yes, I will try ever so much to love papa; indeed I will, for I can't bear to see you unhappy; indeed I can't!"

A few days after this scene Selina and her pupil were passing through the park, on their route to take their daily walk in Kensington Gardens. They saw Lord Almondbury riding with a distinguished-looking elderly man, who seemed to draw his lordship's attention to them. The carriage passed on, without one sign of recognition from the father to his child, nor did a single smile, on her part, mark Lady Adelaide's notice of her parent.

"What a fine countenance the young lady in your carriage has!" observed the companion of Lord Almondbury.

"Yes," replied he; "she has a very fine face. It is a pity, however, that she happens to be one of the saints — a perfect pattern of propriety and prudence, in the shape of a governess to my daughter."

"But in the governess of one's daughter such peculiarities are surely not to be found fault with!" was the reply.

"Perhaps not always; but there *are* certain positions, and mine is one of them, in which, when a pretty girl is by chance thrown in one's way, without one's having sought her, it would be very agreeable to find that she was neither cold nor prudish."

"I must confess, although I do not pretend to be more severe than most other men, that I think one's sins should never be committed at home, and that the roof beneath which dwell a wife and child should be sacred. To corrupt the morals of the person

to whom is confided the education of a daughter, is, in my opinion, a crime of deep dye."

"When such crimes, as you term them, are committed, wives are always to blame. If they *will* be so foolish as to throw temptation in the way of poor weak men, they must take the consequences."

"That is, in other words, if a wife confides in the faith and honour of her husband, which every pure-minded one is prone to do, she ought, according to your doctrine, to be punished for her misplaced confidence. It is precisely this sort of reasoning that renders wives so fearful of engaging handsome governesses, and leaves the last so frequently without employment, as if the gift of beauty debarred them from the possession of the still more precious one — virtue. I seldom see a pretty woman enacting the difficult and painful *rôle* of governess, without observing that she is exposed to the most humiliating suspicions. The common civility due to every one of the sex cannot be paid her, without its exciting surmises, which originate less in any just ground, furnished by the slightest levity or encouragement on her part, than in the too well-founded knowledge of the laxity of principle of our sex."

"I am afraid the best of us all are but sad sinners," observed Lord Almondbury, with a self-complacency more suited to the admission of a community in the good qualities of mankind than in that which dishonours them. This evident self-complacency seemed to disgust his companion, who abruptly wished him good morning, and turned his horse's head in another direction.

CHAPTER XVII.

"YES," soliloquized Lord Almondbury, "she is a very beautiful girl, and who knows whether she be really as cold and reserved *as she appears*. Women, even the most youthful of the sex, are *such adepts in* deception! It is, however, well worth while to *ascertain this* point; and as faint heart never won fair lady, I will *make the* experiment. But how is it to be made? Ah! there

the question. She is never to be seen alone, — Adelaide is with her all day, and she spends her evenings with my wife. She walks every day in Kensington Gardens, I know, and is now there. *Allons*, I 'll stroll there as if by chance, enact *le bon* papa by walking with my daughter, and judge by Miss Stratford's manner how far I may venture. She is so devilish pretty that it is worth while trying to please her."

The result of these cogitations was, his lordship putting his horse into a canter, and directing his course towards another entrance to Kensington Gardens than that at which his carriage had a short time previously set down his daughter and her governess; for he did not wish to furnish a topic for the gossiping of his groom, coachman, and footman, who might form suspicions of his motive for going there. A man conscious of his own evil intentions is ever prone to imagine that others will detect them; hence the wicked are much more on their guard than the good, and by a cunning, which is the fruit of their evil qualities, often escape a censure to which the artless and undesigning but too frequently lay themselves open, by a want of attention to appearances.

Lord Almondbury had not long entered Kensington Gardens when he saw Selina Stratford and her pupil at a little distance, and as they walked on before him, he had an opportunity of observing the attention excited by Selina; every man that encountered her, pausing, when she passed, to look after her, while she moved on wholly unconscious that she was an object of general attraction.

Lord Almondbury's was a mind to be influenced by the opinions of other men in certain points. Struck at the first view by the beauty of Selina, he now became still more disposed to yield to its attraction, as he beheld the admiration it excited in others, and reflected that in all probability, some one of those who now paused to gaze on her, would discover her abode, and address to her by letter the declaration he was so anxious not to be forestalled in.

"Yes, there is no time to be lost," thought he, as he quickened his pace to overtake her he was so anxious to join. No symptoms of *pleasure at the unexpected* meeting beamed in the countenance of *his only child, and the* usually reserved deportment of her governess *assumed even a more chilling* aspect as he signified his intention of

walking with them. Somewhat awed by Selina's manner, he took the hand of his daughter, instead of remaining by her side as he had originally intended, and then uttered something about his desire of becoming better acquainted with Lady Adelaide.

"You speak Italian, I believe, Miss Stratford?" observed he.

Selina replied in the affirmative.

"Yes, I heard you conversing with Lady Almondbury in that language the other day, and your pronunciation struck me to be so pure, that it occurred to me that it would be a very good opportunity for me to brush up my Italian a little, which I have greatly neglected for some time, by chatting with you."

Selina made no reply; but Lady Adelaide said, "O pray speak French, papa, for then I can understand what is said, for I know French very well, don't I, dear Miss Stratford?"

The father bit his nether lip, and looked angry; but after a moment's reflection, he resumed, "Well, then, Adelaide, as you already know French so well, the sooner you learn Italian the better, and by hearing Miss Stratford and me converse you will at least acquire a familiarity with the accent, if not the sense of what we utter."

He then turned to Selina, and in tolerably good Italian observed, "that he was not surprised to see the general admiration her beauty excited, that all men paid homage to it as she passed, but that none felt its power so profoundly as he did."

Selina requested that he would select any other subject for his conversation, as no one could be so little acceptable to her as that; and the grave and dignified manner in which she made this reproof, evinced the truth of her assertion.

"But how is it possible to forbear speaking of that which fills the heart?" said he. "Throw off this coldness and reserve. I love you, am rich, and disposed to be generous. I can secure you independence, and will so conduct myself that no suspicion shall light on you. Or, if you prefer it, I will at once provide you with a house and establishment suitable to your merit, and —"

"Hold, my lord, and no longer insult my ears by *such language*," and the cheeks of Selina were crimsoned with *indignation* and wounded virtue.

"I am sure, papa, Miss Stratford does not like speaking Italian with you," said little Lady Adelaide, "for see how red her face has got; and I never saw her look angry before."

"Don't be such a prude, lovely girl," resumed Lord Almondbury. "I really would not for worlds insult or pain you; but when I see a beautiful creature like you, immured three parts of the day in a dull school-room, labouring to instruct a spoilt girl like mine, and shut up all the evening in a boudoir that no breath of air ever visits, trying to amuse a poor hypochondriac that is no longer amuseable, and all for a paltry salary, much less than I give my valet, by Jove I can't stand it; and I long to place you where every luxury, every pleasure, will court your acceptance."

"I will no longer listen to such insults, my lord," said Selina, turning to leave the garden. "My position in your lordship's family should have saved me from them," and tears filled her eyes and impeded her utterance.

"I knew you would make Miss Stratford angry. See how you have made her weep," said Lady Adelaide. "Mamma never makes her cry when *she* speaks Italian to her."

"That troublesome child will make mischief by telling tales, unless you recover your calmness. For your own sake, if not for mine, for the sake of Lady Almondbury, whose delicate health renders any shock dangerous, assume your usual air and manner, and I promise that I will say no more on this subject."

Selina was so fluttered and agitated that she found great difficulty in subduing her feelings sufficiently to assume a calm demeanour, although she was fully aware of the necessity of it, if only to avoid the inquisitive glances of the passers by, who had noticed her heightened colour and humid eyes. She trembled, too, lest her pupil should reveal to Lady Almondbury *her* version of the scene that had just occurred; for the simple statement that Lord Almondbury had joined them in Kensington Gardens, and spoken all the time in Italian to her governess; had made her very angry, and brought tears to her eyes, would be quite enough to enlighten Lady Almondbury on the whole fact, and to inflict a pain and chagrin which, in her feeble state, it was of the greatest importance she *should* be spared. Yet to continue in the house,

after the undisguised avowal of passion made by Lord Almondbury, she felt would be wrong. Cruel man! to compel her to resign a situation in which she had been so happy, and where she had been of use to the interesting and amiable invalid, as well as to her dear little pupil. Such were the thoughts that filled her mind, as silently she retraced her steps to the carriage.

Vexed and disappointed at his utter failure in his base designs, Lord Almondbury walked to the gate where he had left his horse, muttering "curses not loud but deep" on what he called the folly of his intended victim. "I hope she won't be such a confounded simpleton as to tell Lady Almondbury," thought he. "*That* would be deucedly disagreeable. Not that I have any scene to fear with *her*, for I must do her the justice to say that she never tries any. Whatever her suspicions may be that I am a *mauvais sujet*, she never treated me to a scene of jealousy yet, and so much the better for her; for while she utters no reproaches I feel myself compelled to observe some appearance, at least, of good terms with her. Were she to act differently I could not answer for myself. Women are great fools when they betray their knowledge, or even their suspicions, of their husbands' infidelity; for then they absolve them from the necessity of keeping up appearance, and harden them against the shame first experienced when a man goes astray. My wife's pale cheek, melancholy look, and patient endurance, often have more effect on me, than all the reproaches that a jealous wife could utter in a long life. Yes, positively, I sometimes feel for the poor thing, especially when I remember how passionately she once loved, and how entirely she trusted me. Heigh ho! Poor Frances! The first few months of our marriage were indeed halcyon days. She so trusting, I so fond. It is a pity it could not last! Then she became *enceinte*, got ill, lost her beauty. Women *enceinte* always do: could go with me no where, and although at first she looked surprised, nay, hurt too, that I would not stay at home to nurse her, she never uttered a request on the subject; and I soon found myself back with my old cronies, on the same terms as previously to my marriage; and then, when my wife was confined, and of a girl too, instead of a boy, on which I had set *my heart*, she was so occupied and delighted with her littly *pou-*

parde, that I saw no necessity to fall back into conjugal thraldom. Then her health began to give way. There must be consumption in her family, or what else could make her always ill? The doctors said it was something that preyed on her mind. Cunning dogs! they had heard, I suppose of some of my proceedings, and intended that as a hint. I would not take it; besides, I am sure her malady was not of the mind, but of the chest. But even were it otherwise, what could I do? Was I to turn *garde malade*, or enact the *rôle* of a doting husband when I no longer felt the inclination? Women are so foolish and unreasonable; they expect, when they marry, that husbands are to continue lovers for ever, and picture to themselves, poor dupes, that their homes are to be the abodes of never-ceasing bliss. When they find themselves disappointed in these expectations, instead of taking it philosophically, they either abandon themselves to regret, or become regular coquettes to revenge on all men the wrongs they imagine they have received from one. Now we men are wiser. *We* have had experience in love affairs, and know that time, sooner or later, will render us indifferent to the charms we once adored, as well as efface from our hearts any wounds they may have sustained. *We* do not lament when we see indifference replace passion in the hearts of our wives; *au contraire*, it is an end much to be desired, for it saves a poor devil from the jealous scenes he will inevitably be exposed to when his passion cools, which it is sure to do, and his wife's continues. I verily believe that of my poor Frances would have gone on to the end of the chapter, if I had not taken such pains to destroy all her bright illusions, and disenchant her with her idol — myself. But what the deuce could I do? I could not submit to the trammels imposed by the *exigeance* of a love-sick spouse; consequently, to recover and secure my liberty, I was compelled to let her see me in my natural character, and the result has been, that the discovery has injured her peace, and impaired a health never strong enough to resist a disappointment of the heart. Women of her peculiar temperament and character should never marry, for as no man can continue to enact the enamoured lover after he has been a year a husband, they are certain

to be disappointed, and to be unhappy for years, if not for ever, under the sense of it."

So reasoned Lord Almondbury. It never occurred to him that men of *his* peculiar temperament and character should never marry, certain as he was, that such men could never secure the happiness of a right-minded and amiable wife. No, he looked on women as born to submit to men, their lords and masters, and would have been ready to exclaim, with the sultan in a French opera, when he quits one favourite sultana, who weeps his infidelity, for another and newer flame,

"Dissimulez votre peine, et respectez mes plaisirs."

Lady Almondbury had too much pride and delicacy to reproach her husband, even had she not been well-convinced of the utter uselessness of such a measure. Aware that he no longer loved her, her sole wish was to retain his respect, and to see him entertain for their child some portion of that affection, the absence of which not only deeply pained her, but was calculated to have an injurious effect on the little girl, who had already evinced, on many occasions, her consciousness of the indifference, if not dislike, of her father towards her. The patience and resignation with which Lady Almondbury submitted to the neglect and unkindness of her unfeeling and selfish husband, far from operating favourably on his mind, or ensuring his gratitude, served only to encourage his wilfulness. Her forbearance he looked on as a tacit toleration of his conduct; nay, when vexed or irritated abroad, he returned to his own house to vent on the nervous and sensitive invalid the ebullition of a temper never good, but now incurably spoilt by self-indulgence.

Selina experienced an insuperable disinclination to inform Lady Almondbury of the interview with her lord in Kensington Gardens; she felt that she could not name it without betraying, in her countenance at least, some symptoms of the disgust and indignation it had excited in her breast; and yet *not* to state it, might, if the child repeated it, and the chances were that she would, expose her to suspicion. How painful and humiliating was her position! and how did she despise him who had so rendered *it! She* wished that she could refer to the interview when her

pupil was not present, for she feared some *naïve* remark of the clever child might make the mother *au fait* of the truth; and gladly would she have saved the interesting and amiable invalid the chagrin which she knew it must inflict on her; but, as she could have no opportunity before night of a *tête-à-tête* with Lady Almondbury, and must conduct her pupil to the *boudoir*, as usual, before the child retired to bed, no choice was left, but to name the fact as concisely as possible.

"I hope you had a pleasant walk, Miss Stratford," said Lady Almondbury.

"Yes; that is to say, no," was the incoherent reply, Selina blushing to her very temples, from the consciousness of the surprise it must occasion, but, taken unawares by the commonplace, but kindly-meant question. She felt that Lady Almondbury's eyes were fixed on her face, and her blushes and confusion increased in consequence. It was necessary to say something, and she struggled to appear calm while stating the interview with Lord Almondbury; but her manner was so unlike its usual collected and unembarrassed tone, that Lady Almondbury, alarmed by her changeful cheek and visible emotion, asked her if she were ill, and evinced such kindness and interest in putting the question, as achieved a total triumph over the self-control of Selina, who burst into tears.

"Dear, good Miss Stratford has been made ill, I am sure, by papa," said Lady Adelaide; "he *would* stay and walk with us, though he saw Miss Stratford disliked it; and would talk Italian to her all the time, though she wished to speak French or English. He looked very angry when Miss Stratford would not stay any longer in the gardens, and then walked away to another gate quite in a passion."

Lady Almondbury became as pale as marble; her lips quivered with emotion, and she glanced with pitying kindness at Selina, now comprehending the cause of her agitation. Making an effort to recover composure, she turned to her daughter, and gravely rebuked her for commenting on the actions of her papa.

"It is ungrateful, Adelaide," said she, "so to receive what was *meant kindly*. It was natural for your papa, seeing you

walking, to join you, and question Miss Stratford on your progress; and he preferred doing this in a language you do not speak."

The little girl looked abashed, but not convinced; and, while blushes still mantled on her cheek, she turned to her mother, and, with the pertinacity peculiar to over-indulged children, anxious to exculpate herself from the charge of ingratitude, she demanded, "Why then, mamma, was papa so very much displeased? Good, kind Miss Stratford tells me she is satisfied with me, and would tell papa the same, so that he would not be angry at that."

This logic was so conclusive, that Lady Almondbury could not refute it; but her pale cheek became tinged with red, and her ill-concealed embarrassment pained Selina so much, that she checked the further remarks of the clever child by quickly changing the subject.

When, as usual, she was that evening summoned to the *boudoir* of Lady Almondbury, she felt conscious of a feeling of timidity and constraint never previously experienced since her first entrance into the establishment, nor did the increased paleness, or heavy eyes, betraying the traces of recent tears, of the amiable invalid, help to reassure her, although Lady Almondbury's manner, always kind and gentle, was even more so than before.

CHAPTER XVIII.

With all the intuitive tact and quickness of apprehension that peculiarly appertain to women of delicacy and sentiment, Lady Almondbury readily divined the whole affair of the *rencontre* in Kensington Gardens, and it needed not the *naïve* disclosures of her daughter to make the mortifying truth deeply, painfully, felt. She could duly appreciate the motives that influenced the conduct of Selina. She saw at a glance the embarrassment and chagrin under which the poor girl laboured, and anxious to relieve her, yet unwilling to censure Lord Almondbury, she hardly knew how to act, or what to say. She could not, without great regret and *reluctance*, contemplate a separation from one whose society

had soothed her solitude, and rendered many an hour of pain and languor, more endurable. A long illness is apt to engender selfishness even in persons who, previously to its assaults, had been strangers to this too common defect. The *ennui* peculiar to days of physical suffering, and the lassitude that never fails to accompany it, rendering all occupation, either mental or bodily, most difficult and fatiguing, if not impracticable, had been often and painfully experienced by the valetudinarian. The relief consequently afforded by the society of one who loved her, was too great and welcome to be resigned without deep regret; and to save it, Lady Almondbury, yielding for the first time in *her* life to the dictates of selfishness, deliberated whether or not she might still retain the presence of her, who had been such a comforter to *her*, and so excellent a teacher to her child. Where could she hope to find a governess with equal ability and zeal, to replace Miss Stratford near Lady Adelaide? This last reflection was paramount to all others in the mother's heart, and triumphed over the scruples entertained since the discovery of the meeting at Kensington Gardens, on the propriety of retaining Selina under a roof where she might be exposed to the insulting pursuit of a lawless libertine, who respected neither the home of his wife nor child, nor the purity of her to whom the education of that only child was confided. Of the virtue of Selina, Lady Almondbury entertained not a single doubt, for there was that native dignity and self-respect, inseparable from conscious rectitude, about her, that convinced Lady Almondbury that the arts of even the most practised seducer would be tried in vain on one so right-minded. But, although the virtue of the orphan might escape triumphant from all snares, would she, herself a mother, be justified in retaining her where her reputation might suffer, were the libertine views of Lord Almondbury once made known to others, as they had so lately been made evident to herself? While these painful reflections were passing in the mind of Lady Almondbury, thoughts of a no less disagreeable nature occupied Selina. How was she to break to her kind patroness her desire to withdraw from her house, without exciting mortifying suspicions *of the cause*? Yet she felt that this step must be taken; for

to remain would be to grant a tacit encouragement to the unprincipled Lord Almondbury to renew his dishonourable and insulting proposals; the bare recollection of which sent the blood to her cheeks, and made her heart throb with indignation.

Never had a half hour passed so painfully and slowly in that *boudoir* since Selina Stratford had become an inmate in the mansion, as while these thoughts were passing in the minds of Lady Almondbury and herself. Each felt unwilling to break silence, knowing that it must be to enter on a subject most painful to both; and this consciousness increased their embarrassment. At length Lady Almondbury spoke, although undecided what line of conduct to adopt. *She* would be governed by what Selina should determine on; and tremulous from anticipation that her fears would be realised, that the companion whose society had so cheered the long and weary hours of her sick chamber would announce her intention of leaving her, she observed "I fear, my dear Miss Stratford, that you are not quite well." Kindness is never more deeply felt than when we are meditating a separation from those who bestow it.

The sweet and affectionate tone in which her patroness uttered these few words, brought tears to the eyes of Selina, and her tongue faltered as she replied — "No, dear lady, I am not ill, but" — and here she paused, and for a few minutes was speechless from emotion.

"Do not distress yourself, my dear and amiable young friend," said Lady Almondbury. "If you have any thing painful to communicate, and your agitation but too well prepares me for it, delay pronouncing it until you are more calm, until I too am better able to bear it than at present;" and Lady Almondbury became paler than before, and tears stood in her eyes. She extended her white and attenuated hand to Selina, who pressed it to her lips, and as she felt it tremble in her own, a pang passed through her heart at the notion that she must leave one from whom she had experienced such unvarying kindness and encouragement, and at a period too, when custom had rendered her *efforts to* please and be useful to the dear invalid more necessary *and acceptable.*

"I fear I must leave you, dear lady," said Selina, feeling the absolute necessity of not postponing the announcement of her intention.

"I feared so," replied Lady Almondbury, and she pressed the hand of Selina, in which her own still rested.

"Circumstances," resumed Selina, "over which I have no control, compel this, to me, most painful step; for your goodness to me, dear lady, the gratitude it has created in my heart, and the affection I feel for dear Lady Adelaide, render my parting from you one of the most painful trials of my life."

"You know not how dear, how necessary you are become to me, dear Miss Stratford," said Lady Almondbury; careful not to inquire the cause for a step so pregnant with regret to her. Too well did she divine the motive for Selina's departure; but feelings of delicacy towards her, as well as an unwillingness to touch on a subject that must inculpate her husband — the once passionately loved partner of her home and heart, the still dear father of her home and heart, the still dear father of her child — sealed her lips from betraying her knowledge of it. She paused, while deliberating with herself what step to take; and then again pressing Selina's hand, earnestly requested her not to leave her for a few weeks more at least; adding, "I shall be so lonely, dear Miss Stratford; for Lord Almondbury is going to France for a couple of months."

Selina well understood what this intelligence meant. It was a delicate mode of satisfying her mind, that, in yielding to the request of her kind and amiable patroness of remaining a few weeks longer, she need not fear being exposed to any more insults from Lord Almondbury. She felt pleasure in assenting to the proposal, and Lady Almondbury, gratified at having secured the society of a companion so congenial to her taste, even for a few more weeks, resumed her usual calm and sweet manner, and evinced a more than ordinary interest in her favourite.

As Selina looked on her beautiful face — still lovely in spite of the ravages of disease, and that fragile form so shadowy, yet graceful, which conveyed the notion that it was already fit for the skies — she felt as if in the presence of a being purified from all

earth's passions and stains, who was only for a brief period lent to this world, and who might soon, too soon, be called to that heaven, which seemed to be her native sphere.

The poet who asserted that a brave man, struggling with misfortune, was one of the noblest sights, might have added, that a woman, young, beautiful, and good, disappointed in her tenderest affections, resigning herself to a premature grave, and sustaining the assaults of a cureless and painful malady without murmuring, was no less so. Every sentence uttered by Lady Almondbury was instinct with patient sweetness; it was as if disease, in destroying the mortal part, had but more revealed the immortal; as if a veil had been removed from the soul, and allowed its perfection to be all disclosed. A thousand sad reflections crowded into her mind, as she listened to the low, clear, harmonious accents, and gazed on the almost transparent face, radiant with goodness, of the fair being before her. Could no art avail to save her from the arms of death, already extended to grasp her? Was that high and intellectual brow, the throne of noble thoughts, soon to be laid in the grave; and those delicate cheeks and eloquent lips, to become food for the worms?

"Oh! why," thought Selina, "cannot the chosen of earth, like the beautiful flowers we cherish, droop and fall to the clay, whence they sprang, without all the fearful ceremony of the dark grave, the polluting worm, to consume the mortal coil that for a few brief years serves as an envelope to the spirit, doomed one day to ascend to a purer sphere? Ah! was it to correct and humble us, poor creatures as we are, that it was decreed that those dearest to us on earth, who made the charm, the blessing, of our lives, should no sooner resign their breath, than, in a short time, we are forced to consign them to the grave, to hide the ravages of decomposition, that proves (Oh how painfully to us!) 'what dust we dote on,' and yield the hungry worm its prey?"

Such were the gloomy reflections that filled the mind of Selina *for a short time;* but, as she listened to the aspirations of the *fragile being* before her, who spoke of that better world, to which *she expected soon* to be called, less gloomy thoughts passed into *her mind.* She felt that the decay of the body was but as the

casting off the perishable part, as the chrysalis soars from the matter that had enveloped it and kept it from its higher destiny.

It was late ere Lady Almondbury permitted Selina to leave the boudoir. Indisposed to sleep, she poured out to the attentive ears of her delighted auditress the wisdom that is the fruit of grave reflection, on the instability and nothingness of life, forced on her by the sense of her own frail tenure on existence. She felt that her days were numbered; that she must soon go hence, to be no more seen on earth; but her thoughts reverted to that other, better life, to which the grave is but the portal; and so cheering were her words, and so bright her hopes, that, in listening to them, Selina overcame that internal shudder, that dread of death, with which the young and healthy are prone to contemplate the awful change. They parted more affectionately than ever. Lady Almondbury saw that she had not over-rated the youthful governess of her daughter, when she had given her credit for as much virtue, and more prudence, than often fall to the lot of persons so young and inexperienced. Her desire to withdraw from a situation where she had, previously to Lord Almondbury's unpardonable attempt to ingratiate himself with her, been so happy, and the tact and delicacy with which she had avoided revealing his turpitude, had made a deep impression on the mind of his wife. Such was precisely the line of conduct she could approve, testifying, as it did, how readily the poor and dependent girl could sacrifice all the advantages enjoyed in her present home, rather than expose herself to the libertine designs of Lord Almondbury, or give uneasiness to his amiable and suffering wife.

When Selina entered her chamber, she found on her table a letter addressed to her in an unknown hand. The circumstance was so unusual a one, that for a moment she hesitated to open it: a presentiment that it contained nothing agreeable passed through her mind, and she was half-disposed to commit it to the flames; but, after a little reflection, and chiding herself for her weakness of nerves, she broke the seal, and, reading a few lines, found that the letter was from Lord Almondbury, and contained a repetition of the insulting proposals which he had presumed to address to her on that day.

"I am on the point of leaving England for a tour on the Continent;" wrote the hardened *roué;* "and if you, my lovely Miss Stratford, will be the partner of my travels, you will render me at once the happiest and most grateful fellow on earth. I will make a settlement, before we go, that will secure you an ample provision for life, as also for any family that may come. At Paris you can engage a *femme de chambre*, and there, as elsewhere, you shall have an abode and equipage suitable to your beauty and my station. Consider how humiliating and precarious is the position of a governess. In my family you may not have experienced the caprice and unkindness generally to be met with, but in how few can you expect to find so indulgent a patroness as in my wife? whose delicate health and weakness of nerves dispose her to seek companionship and show friendship, instead of maintaining the reserve and dignity peculiar to ladies in her position. I cannot believe that the disdain and indignation you so unmercifully manifested this day, when I avowed the passion you had excited in my breast, was serious. I looked on it as a clever piece of acting, which had two motives: the first, to enhance your merit in my eyes; and the second, to deceive the *espièglerie* of my daughter, who is, I must acknowledge, remarkably cunning for her age. Come, be honest, and confess I have guessed rightly. You felt certain that Lady Adelaide would tell her mother of our interview, and as certainly mention the displeasure it appeared to afford you, which would exonerate *you* from all blame, and leave censure or suspicion to fall wholly on my shoulders, which are sufficiently large to bear even a greater burden. The manœuvre was a clever one, and I admire the skill with which you carried it through; but, having frankly confessed this much, I must now tell you that there is no good to be obtained by continuing it.

"I cannot admire you more than I do, and am willing to prove it by the liberality of my settlement. Throw off the mask, and make me at once the happiest of men, by accepting my offer. You can feign the illness of some near relative, as an excuse for leaving. Go to Folkstone, where I will join you, and, free as air, and happy as love can make us, we will wing our way to France and Italy; *and when* we return, you shall find a house replete with every ele-

gance and comfort ready for your reception. Two lines, to say what day you will be ready to start, left on my library table, will oblige your devoted, "A——."

Selina threw the odious letter from her with feelings of indignation, that brought the blood to her very temples. Was it, indeed, possible that her undisguised anger and disgust could have been mistaken by Lord Almondbury for the *ruse* and calculation of an unprincipled and shameless coquette? Tears, bitter tears, of insulted virtue chased each other down her cheeks, and she felt as if degraded by remaining a single night under the roof of a man capable of such base conduct as Lord Almondbury had evinced towards her. Might he not, if, after this fresh insult, she continued in the house, misconstrue it into a tacit toleration of his dishonourable views, and postpone his departure for the Continent? Yet how was she, after her promise to Lady Almondbury of remaining with her for some weeks more, to announce or explain the change in her plans to that most amiable and suffering lady? Many were the tears shed that night before sleep deigned to visit her pillow, and well might she have exclaimed with the poet —

> "Tired Nature's sweet restorer, balmy Sleep;
> He, like the world, his ready visit pays
> Where Fortune smiles: the wretched he forsakes;
> Swift on his downy pinions flies from woe,
> And lights on lids unsullied with a tear."

But poor Selina felt her painful position too profoundly to be able to apostrophize, even had she remembered the lines of Young. Her isolated and unprotected state; — an orphan, — without a single relative in the world on whom she had a claim, her only friends being the worthy Mr. Vernon and his wife, — how was she to relate to them the gross insult offered her by Lord Almondbury; yet this must be done, in order to account for her throwing up a situation which she had so frequently, in her letters to them, expressed her happiness and gratitude at having obtained. Blushes of shame dyed her cheeks at the very notion of this painful, humiliating, but unavoidable disclosure. To a pure-minded and *virtuous* woman there is nothing so mortifying, save

the insult itself, as to have to communicate to others that she has been approached with disrespect, that dishonourable proposals have been addressed to her. Her very purity seems stained in her own eyes, by having to make such an avowal, and she trembles lest those to whom it must be made, should, even for a moment, imagine that aught approaching to levity on her part could have encouraged the gross affront.

But after having wept those bitter tears that flow from outraged feelings, and the consciousness of utter helplessness to avert such insults, back came the pleasing and re-assuring conviction, that the only two friends to whom it would be necessary to give an explanation for leaving her present situation, were little likely to misjudge her, or form the slightest suspicion that the heartless libertine, who had dared to shock her ears by his odious offers, had ever seen anything in her conduct to justify so base a proceeding on his part. This reflection, and the confidence it inspired, soothed her feelings, and gratefully did she thank the Almighty for having giving her friends, on the steadiness of whose esteem she could count in such an emergency, without a single doubt or fear of being misunderstood.

CHAPTER XIX.

At an early hour next morning a loud knocking at her door aroused Selina from slumber.

"For Heaven's sake, Miss Stratford, come to my lady as soon as possible," said the maid appointed to wait on Lady Adelaide and her governess, "for her ladyship has burst a blood-vessel, and, I fear, is dying!"

Selina lost not a moment in making her hurried toilet, and ran to the chamber of Lady Almondbury, whom she found pale as marble, supported by pillows, and gasping for breath. A faint smile marked her recognition of Selina, to whom she extended her almost transparent hand; she attempted to speak, but the sanguine stream that rushed to her lips impeded her utterance, and proved the danger of the effort. She shook her head mournfully, and looked in Selina's face with an expression of such sweetness

and resignation, as brought the tears to her eyes. The doctor, who had been sent for before Selina was summoned, now arrived. He felt the pulse of his patient, looked grave, and exhorted her not to attempt to speak. Lady Almondbury motioned to Selina to take a seat by her bedside, and the doctor having written a prescription, which was forthwith despatched to the apothecary's, he took his place at the opposite side of the bed.

"Is Lord Almondbury in town?" asked he, addressing the *femme de chambre*.

"Yes, Sir. His lordship is at home, but we have not called him, as his lordship came home very late."

A faint blush arose to the cheek of Lady Almondbury, who had heard the question and answer; but it soon receded, and left her paler than before. Again the doctor felt her pulse, and while he held her hand a spasm passed over her face.

"My child," exclaimed Lady Almondbury, turning her eyes with a look of the most earnest appeal to Selina, and again the blood streamed from her lips.

"My dear lady, you must not utter a word; indeed you must not," said the doctor, evidently very much alarmed.

"May I not bring Lady Adelaide?" demanded Selina, urged on by the appealing glances of the anxious mother.

"Yes, yes, bring the child," was the answer.

"My — husband," faltered Lady Almondbury.

"Send for his lordship directly," said the doctor.

"Dear, dear, mamma!" exclaimed Lady Adelaide, breaking from her governess, and rushing to her dying mother; but the doctor held her back, and restrained her from throwing herself into the outstretched arms of Lady Almondbury.

"You must be gentle, young lady; your mamma is too ill to bear the least exertion."

The child approached the bed with all possible gentleness, and seizing the hand of her mother, pressed it fondly to her lips, while the tears fell fast on it.

The doting mother gazed on her child with an expression of unutterable fondness, and tried to speak, but her lips were so tremulous from her deep emotion, that utterance was denied her.

It was in truth a piteous sight, to behold that still young and lovely woman, conscious that she was gazing on her only child for the last time, with all a mother's prescience and tenderness throbbing in that heart that was soon to beat no more, yet unable to articulate the blessing she longed to bestow on her fair and youthful head.

Selina was melted to tears, which she turned away her head to conceal, and even the doctor, though accustomed to such heart-rending scenes, was moved.

Lord Almondbury now entered the room, attired in a splendid brocaded silk *robe de chambre* and trousers, and his feet encased in richly embroidered slippers. It was evident that he had arranged his hair, for it bore the marks of having been carefully combed and brushed, and his whole appearance testified the total absence of that disorder peculiar to a sudden summons from sleep. What a contrast did his gaudy undress and healthful face and person offer to the scene before him! There lay the shadowy form and emaciated though still beautiful face of her who had "loved him not wisely, but too well" — of her who had, in the pride of youth and beauty, when many noble suitors sought her hand, preferred him to all others, and yielded him her whole heart. There she lay, the victim of his inconstancy, neglect, and unkindness, hurried to a premature grave because her heart was not formed of firmer stuff to resist the wounds he had inflicted on it. He had entered the chamber with a step much less noiseless than the occasion warranted, for, having on a former night, some months before, been summoned to his wife, who, by her attendants, was believed to be dying, he concluded that the present was a similar false alarm, and, consequently, was not prepared for the truth. The dying woman recognised his step, turned her eyes on him with a mingled expression of pardon, pity, and love, such as angels might bestow on erring mortals, and, extending her hand, made a desperate effort to speak.

"Our child," faltered she, turning her glance on the weeping little girl, "promise me that you will love and cherish her for my sake who have loved you so well. Promise me, dear Henry, — it *is my last* request."

Stubborn as was the heart of him to whom it was addressed, this request, uttered by the faltering lips of his dying wife, deeply affected Lord Almondbury.

"You will still live, dearest," said he, and he pressed her extended hand to his lips.

The dying woman faintly shook her head, and again urged him to promise to love and cherish their child.

"I promise, faithfully promise, dearest!" replied he, and tears started to his eyes, the first that had visited them since his childhood.

"I had forgotten; there is another request I would urge," said Lady Almondbury. "I wished to secure a provision for Miss Stratford for her life. You will settle one hundred a-year on her, and present her with one of my watches as a memorial of my affection and esteem."

The exertion of speaking was too much for Lady Almondbury. Her head fell on her bosom, blood streamed anew from her lips, a slight convulsion passed over her face, and all was over.

"Frances! my own poor Frances!" exclaimed Lord Almondbury wildly, "she is not — she cannot be dead — she has only fainted; oh! doctor, give her quickly some restorative!" and sobs almost choked him.

"Alas! my lord, it is all over. Let me lead you from this room. Your child requires all our care, for see, she has fainted."

Lord Almondbury flung himself on the bed in an agony of grief, the truth and intensity of which astonished all present, as much as it would have soothed her who had so lately breathed her last, could she have seen it; for with all a woman's fondness, she would have clung to the thought of being mourned by him, to whom she had given her virgin heart.

Selina, while tears chased each other down her pale face, assisted in removing Lady Adelaide to her own room, and the doctor having administered *sal volatile* and water to Lord Almondbury, led him to his. It was touching to witness the grief of the poor child when she was returned to consciousness. She could hardly be brought to believe that she was indeed motherless — that the eyes that had so lately gazed on her with such deep

tenderness, were closed for ever — that the voice which had never addressed her but with fondness, she should never more hear. Poor girl! If those numbering ten times her years, cannot during the first hours of a bereavement like hers, bring themselves to believe the fearful truth, how little can it be wondered, that stunned by the overwhelming blow, her senses recoiled from it, and that refusing to credit the appalling fact, she entreated again and again to be permitted to return to the chamber of death, saying, "Only let me see my mother, touch her, speak to her, and convince myself that she is, as they say, dead, for I cannot, indeed I cannot, believe it!"

Tenderly did Selina Stratford watch over the impatient mourner, listen to her lamentations broken by sobs, and endeavour to soothe her, until, exhausted by the violence of her sorrow, the poor child fell into a profound slumber, and then she stole to the chamber of death, unwilling that the last rites due to the departed should be performed solely by menial hands. She found Mrs. Morgan, the faithful waiting-woman of poor Lady Almondbury, sitting in speechless grief by the bedside of her mistress, and aroused her from the stupor in which she seemed plunged by offering her assistance for the sad duties required. "Ah, Miss Stratford, I thank you!" sobbed Mrs. Morgan. "You loved my dear lady, and your hands are worthy of touching her. I could not bear that those who never approached her person in life should——;" but here the tears of the poor woman impeded her utterance.

With trembling hands Selina fulfilled the melancholy task she had assigned herself. She closed the eyes of the departed, arranged her long and silken tresses, cutting off one for her child; and having gently placed the head on its pillow, was gratified to see the face, still beautiful in death, wear the calm and angelic expression that had characterized it when in life. Her labours — and they were labours of love — finished, she sank on her knees by the bed, and prayed long and fervently. Never in the house of God did she feel her soul lighted up to its Creator with more exalted piety, than while contemplating the tranquil loveliness of the face of the newly departed, which seemed already to

bear the impress of that heaven to which, she hoped and trusted, the spirit had taken its flight. She prayed that the child left on earth might emulate the virtues of the mother, and like her meet death, filled with hope and confidence of mercy, through the Redeemer. Tears rolled down her cheeks as she looked on that calm, sweet face, — that marble brow, which pain or care could never more contract, — those closed lids, whence never more a tear could steal; and blamed her own selfishness, that could still desire to retain on earth, where only trials and sufferings awaited her, the pure spirit that had fled to its God.

She had taken her place by the couch of Lady Adelaide before she awoke, and watched over her with pitying tenderness. Never had she been so forcibly struck with the likeness between the child and her mother, as now; for the juvenile character, which the face of poor Lady Almondbury had assumed in death, rendered the resemblance more visible. But oh, how far less calm was the countenance of the sleeping girl! The brows were curved, traces of recent tears marked the cheeks, the lips occasionally trembled, and convulsive sobs heaved the chest. The word "mamma" was often murmured in that unquiet slumber, and in so plaintive a tone as to increase the sadness of her who watched so tenderly over the sleeper. When Lady Adelaide awoke, and turned her eyes on Selina, a dreamy unconsciousness marked her countenance. She raised her hand to her forehead, as if to recal her memory, and then burst into a passionate fit of grief, saying "Mamma, mamma! Oh take me to mamma!"

Many were the kind words and affectionate embraces bestowed by Selina on her pupil, while the latter was being dressed by her maid; but the promise of being taken to see her dead mother had the greatest effect in soothing her. A message from Lord Almondbury, to desire the presence of his daughter, first recalled Selina to a consciousness of the awkwardness of her position in the house of a man who had presumed to address his libertine views to her, now that Lady Almondbury's death deprived her of the protection that lent a sanction to her residence there. She instantly wrote a letter to the excellent Mrs. Vernon, requesting her presence, being determined to be guided by her

advice; and, rather than leave Lady Adelaide until the poor child was more reconciled to the bereavement so lately sustained, she would request Mrs. Vernon to remain with her until after the funeral.

When Lady Adelaide returned to her governess, Selina was pleased to find that she appeared less wretched than before her interview with her father. "Poor papa?" said the intelligent little girl, "he is so unhappy and cried so much, that I tried to comfort him. He took me in his arms and kissed me very often, and said I was like my dear blessed mother. I never thought papa could weep, did you, dear Miss Stratford?"

Glad was Selina to discover by the artless words of her pupil, that the heart of Lord Almondbury was touched by the death of his amiable and neglected wife, and sincerely did she pray that his late remorse and regret would not be of brief duration, being convinced that on the purifying effect of both on his heart, would his affection for his child find its surest basis; but her hopes of this desirable change in him were not very sanguine, as she dreaded that selfishness and habitual indulgence in libertine pursuits, had hardened his nature too much to permit repentance and grief to be more than temporary guests in his breast.

"I think I shall now be able to love papa," resumed the child. "Dear mamma often told me I must love him, but I never thought I could till I saw him weeping for her. He showed me her picture; oh! such a beautiful face, Miss Stratford! not pale and sad, as I always saw her, but with a fresh pink colour on her cheeks, her eyes so bright that they look as if they had never shed a tear, — and such a sweet happy smile. I said so to papa, and then he cried afresh, and told me that when that picture was painted, dear mamma was as happy as she looked; and he muttered something about 'wretch, and ungrateful;' I didn't quite hear what it was, and he struck his hand against his forehead, and looked so miserable, that I kissed him, and said, 'Poor, *dear papa,*' and then he hugged me closely to his breast, and said *it was just* like what my angel mother would have done. Yes, *dear Miss* Stratford, he called my own mamma angel, and *blessed*, every time he spoke of her, and that made me love him

very much. I wanted to have some one to kiss and love, as I used to kiss and love mamma. Not that I can ever love any one as I did her. O! no, Miss Stratford, that would be impossible. But let us go to her room."

It was, indeed, a piteous sight to behold the interesting child gazing on the dead, the tears flowing down her face, and awe restraining her from lavishing those caresses on the departed which she had been wont to do when her mother was in life.

"May I kiss her?" asked she in a whisper, as if fearful of awaking her, whose marble slumber the last trumpet could alone disturb. Selina having assented, she bent down and pressed the lips of her dead mother; but, no sooner had she become sensible of their rigidity and icy coldness, than she withdrew her own in terror, and, throwing herself into the arms of Selina, burst into a paroxysm of grief that it was long ere the soothing expressions of the latter could subdue.

Ah! who is it that has not, under similar circumstances, experienced the same shock? — A shock against which reason would in vain essay to guard us. We know that our bodies are but the temporary abodes of the immortal soul, which no sooner leaves them than these poor tenements of clay betray their native frailty, and retain only the faded likeness of the once-breathing structure; yet how difficult! nay, more, how impossible it is for us to divest ourselves of the love for that poor faded image that filled our hearts, when it was animated by the vital spark! A love that draws our lips to those icy-cold ones, though their contact almost freezes the blood in our veins, and prompts us to address to those ears, sealed in death, the words of affection that were wont to delight them! How heart-breaking it is to look on that immoveable face, while our own is convulsed by the agony of grief, — its very calmness seeming like a mockery of our woe! If we, arrived at maturity, experience these conflicting emotions, can it be wondered at, that childhood should almost sink beneath them? Poor Lady Adelaide remained for a long time, with her face hid *on the bosom of* her governess, listening with breathless *interest, while the latter* explained to her, in terms suited to her *tender years, the* mysterious change from life to death.

"Then that is not really *my* mamma," said the child, pointing with her fingers to the dead, and an impression of awe on her countenance; "and yet, dear Miss Stratford, how like it is! It looks like an image of her in marble, — so white, so cold! Oh, I wish we could for ever keep it here, just as it now is! I would always say my morning and night prayers kneeling by it; and the sight of what was, yet is not, my own blessed mother, would prevent my again being obstinate or self-willed."

While the child was speaking, Lord Almondbury entered the chamber of death, but so softly, that neither Selina nor her pupil were sensible of his approach. He had over-heard Lady Adelaide's wish, and, touched by it, had determined it should be gratified. Selina arose and withdrew, Lord Almondbury having only noticed her presence by a bow; and his daughter took his hand and kissed it. Her pale face and tearful eyes increased her resemblance to her mother, and her father, glancing from the dead to the living, marked his recognition of the striking resemblance, by pressing his daughter to his breast, and he told her to go to her governess. Selina, who had remained in the adjoining room to take charge of Lady Adelaide, heard the door locked when her pupil had passed it; and, ere she had reached the study assigned to the use of the child, heard the sound of stifled sobs issue from the chamber of death.

With what altered feelings do we contemplate our own conduct towards those once dear to us, when they are no more, to the light in which we were accustomed to regard it when they lived! How does every unkind look, word, or action, we may ever have directed to them rise up to reproach us, now that atonement is impossible! We forget all provocation, if provocation we ever had; every error or blemish of the departed is effaced from our memories; and in vain would we recal a single instance of their ever having existed, in order to justify our own sins of omission or commission towards the dead. We can only remember their good qualities; their affection, numberless proofs of which now occur, to fill our hearts with deep but too late remorse; and, as we bend in agony over their pale remains, we feel that we would give worlds, were they *ours to bestow*, to bring back to life those whose deaths, in the

blindness of our hearts, we had dared to contemplate as events that might occur without inflicting the thousandth part of the anguish we now experience. The lapse of years seem forgotten. The indifference, or neglect, brought by time, or wrought by our own inconstancy; nay, even the faults that might have contributed to work such change, have all faded away. We remember only the days of happiness and undiminished affection; the days when the bare thought of losing the object would have been torture; and that torture is now ours, aggravated ten-fold by the reproaches of conscience, which tells us of our own unworthiness to possess the treasures we never before knew how to appreciate, and the loss of which we now vainly deplore. Oh! could we but value those dear to us, while yet Heaven vouchsafes to spare them to us, but half as dearly as we do when they are snatched from us for ever, what agonies of remorse might we not be saved! Could we but recal the past, and atone for any pain or wrong ever inflicted on the departed, what sacrifice would we not willingly, gladly offer up to accomplish it? — Our own part, blindness of heart, seems now, when viewed through the tears of remorse, not only a crime of deepest dye, but a folly, a madness, almost inconceivable! If even the good — those who have inflicted no injury, perpetrated no wrong, been guilty of no intentional act of unkindness — feel a remorse mingle with their regret for the loved dead, when they remember trivial instances of temper, caprice, or neglect, towards them, which, when they were in life, appeared but as trifles, unworthy a grave thought, what must be the pangs of those who are conscious of having embittered the lives of the departed by unkindness, ingratitude, and wrongs? Bitter, indeed, must their feelings be! nor can time heal the wound inflicted by remorse; for the mournful dead will often appeal to memory in the silence of night, chasing sleep from the pillow, and peace from the heart!

Lord Almondbury for the first time of his life experienced the pangs of remorse, as he bent over the inanimate, but still lovely face of his departed wife. He recalled the blissful days that followed his marriage, when intoxicated by her beauty, and sweetness of temper, and vain of having secured a prize sought by many aspirants, he believed himself the happiest of mankind, and felt

grateful to her who had preferred him. How fondly, how faithfully had she loved him; how uncomplainingly borne his neglect, his inconstancy, his unkindness! And there she lay, done to death by his conduct. Yes, the veil was torn from his eyes and he could no longer conceal from himself that disappointment of the heart had led to the destruction of her health, and finally to her premature death. How calm, how beautiful she looked, and how touching was the angelic expression of her face. He threw himself on the bed by her side; his tears fell in abundance over the snowy drapery that covered her cold remains, and he pressed his lips again and again on that marble brow. He implored her pardon, execrated himself for having sinned against Heaven and her, and poured forth his late remorse, his words broken by sobs and groans that vouched for the depth and truth of it. How many instances of her unchanging love, patient sweetness, and constant forbearance, under wrongs and neglect that must have aroused to anger and dislike any nature less perfect than hers, now occurred to his memory; *now*, when it was too late to make atonement for the wrongs she had endured. Yes, she had died unknowing the pangs her loss would inflict on him; here pure soul had fled to heaven, leaving him to drag on a miserable existence, poisoned by remorse and regret. For many hours he left not the chamber of death, and when at last he came forth from it, the waiting-woman of his deceased wife, who met him in the gallery, declared she never could have recognized his lordship, so great was the change wrought in his appearance by grief.

"Ah!" exclaimed she to Selina, "half the tenderness shown after death might save from dying."

CHAPTER XX.

A CELEBRATED sculptor was that day sent for by Lord Almondbury, to take a cast of the face, hands, and feet of the departed lady, for the purpose of having a recumbent statue of her executed for him. He remained present while the operation was performed, had the form so enveloped in drapery that its proportions could not be seen, and evinced as much care and tender-

ness while the plaster was laid on and removed, as if the dead could feel it; he with his own hand removing the traces of it, and smoothing the pencilled brows and pale forehead, with all the watchful tenderness of love. The jealous care with which he prevented the drapery that covered the breast, arms, and legs from being removed, made a deep impression on the sculptor, who was often afterwards heard to observe, that frequently as he had been employed on similar occasions, he had never seen such love and grief, as that witnessed in the case of Lord Almondbury. With his own hand he severed a long tress of her beautiful hair from her head, and when her cold remains were to be placed in their last receptacle to no other hands than his own would he confide the task. His grief, when the lid of the coffin was to be closed for ever, is not to be described. It was as though all the passionate love of the first days of his union with Lady Almondbury had revived in his heart to make him feel the pangs of this mortal separation more acutely. He accompanied the body to its last resting place, overpowered by grief, and when he heard the earth fall on the coffin, he fainted.

Lord Almondbury returned to his widowed home an altered man, and for some days was unable to leave his chamber.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Vernon, who had been summoned by Selina, had promptly repaired to Almondbury House, and having attentively listened to the statement of her young friend, came to the conclusion that the conduct of Lord Almondbury towards her previous to his wife's death, rendered her residence in his house ineligible.

"You must return to my humble abode, my dear Miss Stratford," said the excellent woman, "though I grieve you should be compelled to leave the dear child, who now, more than ever, will stand in need of a judicious and affectionate monitress."

"I cannot bear to leave her to the care of servants," said Selina, "and if possible I would wish to stay with her until I can see her placed in proper hands. But how is this to be effected? I feel the impropriety of my remaining here, without the sanction of the presence of some female friend; but it looks so ungrateful to the dead, and so unkind to the dear Lady Adelaide, to leave the house

during the first shock of the sad event that has just occurred, that I know not what to do."

Make your mind easy on this point, my dear Miss Stratford, *I* will remain here with you, and will write a few lines to inform my husband of my intention, and the cause that has led to it.

"But good, kind Mr. Vernon, he will be so uncomfortable without you. It is not fair, indeed I feel it is not, to keep you from your home, when he will be so solitary and cheerless without you."

"Our servant is a steady and faithful woman, who knows his habits and tastes, she will see to his comforts, and with books, of which we have good store, he will get through his evenings very well; and he will be so glad to have you back with us, though sorry for the cause, that your presence will repay him for the temporary loss of mine."

Selina made known to the housekeeper that her friend would sojourn a few days with her, and requested that a bedroom which communicated with her own, might be prepared for her. Mrs. Middleton, a worthy and respectable woman, perfectly comprehended and approved of the prudence of the measure. She was, as indeed were all the servants of the establishment, but too well aware of the libertine habits of their lord and master, not to be fully sensible of the danger to which a young and handsome Governess would be exposed by being an inmate in his house, now that their loved and honoured lady was no more.

"Miss Stratford," said she, to their late lady's maid, "is a prudent, virtuous young woman, and her having that nice old gentlewoman to come here to keep her company, is a sure proof of it."

The first step Lord Almondbury took when able to attend to business, was to order a splendid monument to be erected to the memory of his lamented wife, and the second was, to give instructions to his Solicitor to draw up a deed of annuity of a hundred guineas a-year for her life, to Miss Stratford. He felt that while fulfilling the requests of the departed, he was making the only atonement in his power to the dead, and he had a melancholy *satisfaction* in executing them to the letter. He now believed him-

self, what those around him gave him implicit credit for being, an altered man. His grief had been so strong, that it, for the time, banished every sinful desire, every libertine thought from his breast, and he imagined that, henceforth, he should never more be the slave of his passions, the sensualist he had been. Great then was his regret, when he received a note from Selina, announcing her intention of resigning her situation in his family, as soon as a successor could be obtained to take charge of Lady Adelaide.

"This comes from my own folly and wickedness," exclaimed he, as he let the note fall on the table near which he was seated, and pressed his hand to his forehead. "Madman, monster, that I was, when not even the presence of the angel I have lost, would prevent me from endeavouring to pollute her home, by attempting to corrupt the Governess of my child. Well may Miss Stratford dread remaining in my house after such atrocious conduct on my part. She knows not, she cannot know how I regret it, and would, in all probability, refuse credence to my assertions on the subject. That my daughter should be deprived of a monitress in whom her angelic mother placed such implicit confidence, and all through my folly, my worse than folly, my guilty views, is indeed a severe, though well-merited punishment. I will write to Miss Stratford, will acknowledge my sin, avow my regret, and pledge myself in the most solemn manner never again to incur her displeasure, if she will only remain with my daughter."

The letter was written and despatched, and the whole tenour of it gratified Selina, by giving her the hope, that the monster was indeed an altered man, and would henceforth respect whoever might fill her place in his family. One of the points which most increased her sorrow in parting from her pupil was, the dread that no governess worthy of having the trust confided her, would remain in the house of Lord Almondbury, unless she happened to be too old to excite improper feelings in his breast, and to elderly governesses, she had heard Lady Almondbury say, he had an unconquerable objection. Her decision of withdrawing from his house, was not, however, to be changed, but while announcing this to his *lordship in a cold* but polite note, she carefully avoided

all recurrence to the past, and simply stated that she could not hold a situation in a house where no lady of the family presided.

"I thought it would be so," said Lord Almondbury, as he laid the letter down. "When will the effects of my folly cease to pursue me. My poor Adelaide! how will this separation afflict her, so fondly attached too, as she is to Miss Stratford, who would have constantly kept alive in her breast the memory of her dear mother, and taught her to emulate the virtues and gentleness of that angelic being."

Lord Almondbury wrote to a maiden aunt of his, requesting her to engage a governess for his daughter, and the result was, a pressing invitation, by return of post from her, for him and Lady Adelaide to join her at her seat in Yorkshire, where she would take charge of her grandniece, until a suitable governess was provided.

The following day, Lord Almondbury inclosed Selina the deed of annuity, granted at the dying request of his wife, securing her one hundred guineas per annum for her life, accompanied by a watch that had belonged to the deceased lady, and a medallion in gold, containing a lock of her hair, and that of her child, with a hundred pound note as a remuneration for her services. A letter couched in the most respectful terms, in which he dwelt on the high esteem in which she had been held by his deceased wife, and expressed his regret at her leaving his family, was sent with the deed of annuity, watch, and medallion.

Selina showed her friend, Mrs. Vernon, the letter, deed, and gift.

"It strikes me that it would not be right for me to accept the annuity," said she; "I have not been sufficiently long in the house to have merited such a reward, and coming from one who insulted me, renders it much more repugnant to my feelings to accept it."

"I confess I do not see it in the same point of view, my dear Miss Stratford. This annuity was granted at the request of Lady Almondbury; used as such, is highly honourable to you. Had her ladyship bequeathed it by will, you could have no scruple in *receiving* it; why, therefore, not accept this gift, granted at her

dying request, as a testamentary bequest? Remember, it did not originate with Lord Almondbury; although I dare say he, in his altered frame of mind, is glad of being furnished with an opportunity of atoning for his former improper conduct. I really think you would not be justified in refusing a gift which is the result of your own merit, and the high sense entertained of it by the deceased lady."

"But coming from *his* hands, spoils its value in my eyes. I may be proud, wilful, and ungrateful, dear Mrs. Vernon, but I really cannot bring myself to accept the annuity."

"Do not at least decide, until you have consulted my husband. He will give you the best advice."

"Were it simply a matter of prudence, I would willingly defer to his judgment, and be guided by it; but this is an affair of feeling, and I must be guided by my own sense of right. I have no sentiment of anger against Lord Almondbury, but to receive an annuity from one who twice insulted me by proposals of the basest nature, I cannot consent to do."

Mrs. Vernon forbore to interfere any further; and though thinking that Selina pushed her scrupulous delicacy further than was necessary, she admired the disinterestedness and self-respect that influenced her decision, and only regretted that it was not in her, or her husband's power to secure independence to one so every way worthy of it. The return of the deed of annuity to Lord Almondbury gave him real pain. He felt that it was his former conduct that had led to the rejection of the gift, and this proof of the delicacy and self-respect of Selina, increased his regret that his daughter should be deprived of one so every way capable of instilling high principle and pure morals into her mind.

In ten days after, Lord Almondbury conducted Lady Adelaide to the country. The parting between that sensitive and affectionate child and her governess cost both many tears; and painful was it to Selina to listen to the reiterated pleadings of her pupil to her dear Miss Stratford, not to leave her.

"I will be so obedient, so good, if you will stay with me," sobbed the weeping girl. "It is so hard to lose my dear blessed mamma, and then for you, too, to leave me."

Lord Almondbury wrote a second letter to Selina, intreating her by the affection she had entertained for the departed, not to reject the gift dictated by her dying breath, but nothing could change her decision; and the evening of the day that Lord Almondbury and his daughter left London, Selina and her kind friend Mrs. Vernon, returned to the home of the latter, where a most cordial welcome awaited them from Mr. Vernon.

"I cannot," said that worthy man, when his wife told him of Selina's rejection of the annuity, "blame Miss Stratford for her high-minded and disinterested conduct; although I could wish that the gift had been a bequest formally made by will, by her late amiable patroness, as in that form she could have accepted it without any scruple; but the conduct of Lord Almondbury must have rendered it humiliating and painful to receive a gift coming through his hands, and, therefore, I can well understand her feelings in refusing it."

The death of Lady Almondbury and the separation from her child, made so deep an impression on Selina, that it required all the kindness of her worthy host and hostess, to conquer the melancholy produced on her mind by these events. In a few days after her instalment in her peaceful abode, she read in a newspaper the departure of Lord Almondbury for the continent, and she wrote a few lines to the *femme de chambre* of the late Lady Almondbury, who now was appointed confidential attendant to her daughter, to enquire after the health of Lady Adelaide. It gave her pleasure to hear, by return of post, that her late pupil was in good health, and gradually recovering her spirits, under the care of her indulgent grand-aunt, with whom she was to remain until Lord Almondbury's return from the continent, which was not expected to be for some months.

And now Selina again turned her thoughts to seeking a situation in some other family; she read over the advertisements for governesses, in which more accomplishments are required than can fall to the lot of mortal, and more virtues expected than poor human nature is heir to, and all for salaries little exceeding the wages bestowed on menials, without the reversionary left-off *clothes they* inherit. One advertisement, more reasonable in the

requisites insisted upon, attracted her attention, and she answered it. In due time an appointment was made, and, accompanied by her kind friend Mrs. Vernon, she went to the place named. No sooner had she entered the sitting-room of a house in Brook-street, in which two ladies were seated, both having a certain asperity of countenance, joined to a striking resemblance of feature, that indicated a near relationship, than, having glanced at her, one of them observed in Italian, that her face was disagreeably associated in her mind, although she could not, at the moment, recollect where she had seen it. The other lady examined the countenance of Selina very much as a police magistrate may be supposed to do that of a criminal brought before him on some serious charge; but neither of the ladies motioned her to a seat, so she and Mrs. Vernon stood in painful embarrassment, near the door so lately entered.

"Where have you last lived?" demanded one of the ladies in a stern tone of voice, that did not tend to encourage the timid girl, to whom the interrogation was addressed.

"With the late Lady Almondbury."

"Ah! yes; now I recollect," exclaimed the lady who had spoken in Italian, still using that language, "this is the very person we saw walking with that odious *roué*, Lord Almondbury, one morning in Kensington Gardens."

The lady to whom this remark was addressed, glanced at Selina with increased asperity, and asked why she had left Lord Almondbury's family.

"I left on the death of Lady Almondbury," was the reply; "not wishing to continue."

"I should not have expected you to be so very scrupulous," observed the other lady; "for, if I mistake not, I saw you walking with his lordship some time ago, in Kensington Gardens."

This speech was uttered with so severe and contemptuous an air, as to bring blushes to the cheeks and brows of her to whom it was addressed, which being noticed, both ladies exchanged triumphant glances.

"Yes, Madam, it is true, Lord Almondbury did one day join

his daughter, Lady Adelaide, when I was walking with her in Kensington Gardens —"

"I will not trouble you any further; you would not at all suit me," rudely interrupted the lady; "but I beg to offer you one piece of advice, which is — to avoid, in whatever place you may enter, permitting gentlemen to walk with you."

There was something so insulting in the tone and manner in which this counsel was given, that Selina could not cheat herself into the belief that it was kindly meant, however convinced of its prudence. She, however, checked every symptom of the indignation she could not wholly vanquish, and explained how entirely against her wish it had been that Lord Almondbury had joined her pupil and herself. But she spoke to those determined on disbelieving her assertions; for, giving her scarcely time to conclude her attempt to exculpate herself, she was told that her past, present, or future conduct was totally uninteresting to the speaker, and that she might withdraw.

Mrs. Vernon, who saw the malignity of this spiteful person, and felt anxious that Selina should not depart without removing, if, possible, the evil impression evidently made on her mind, ventured to address her.

"As the friend of Miss Stratford I must state that she told me of the annoyance Lord Almondbury's presence, with her pupil and herself, inflicted on her, on the sole occasion on which he joined them. You will therefore, I trust, Madam, acquit her of any participation in that occurrence. Her refusing the liberal offer made to her to continue in the family after the death of the late amiable and excellent Lady Almondbury, is her best vindication."

"I am not conscious of professing any charge against the young person," said the sternest looking of the ladies; "and being particularly occupied just now, I have really no time to devote to the affairs of total strangers." And she coldly nodded her head, and rang the bell, leaving Selina, and her discomfitted friend, no choice but to retire, hurt and grieved by the conviction that the two ladies, whom it had pleased fortune to bring *them in* contact with, entertained the most erroneous opinion of

Selina, and would, in all probability, not scruple to express it to others when an occasion might offer.

Tears rushed to the eyes of Selina the moment the door of the house in Brook-street closed after her. Indignation and pride restrained them while in the presence of the two stern and ill-natured women who caused them to flow; but now they were no longer present to witness the pain they had inflicted, she could not repress her tears, although Mrs. Vernon used all her endeavours to soothe her wounded feelings. "To know that there are persons who believe me guilty of encouraging the attentions of a married man, of being an unprincipled hypocrite, and of dishonouring the roof beneath which I was received as an instructress to the child of my dear, honoured Lady Almondbury. Oh! it is too, too cruel!" and the tears and sobs of Selina, as she lent her head on the shoulder of her kind companion, in the carriage into which they entered on leaving Brook-street, would have melted a sterner heart than belonged to the excellent Mrs. Vernon.

CHAPTER XXI.

With what intense dismay does a young and sensitive woman find herself suspected of conduct, from the bare notion of which she would shrink with horror and dread. Nor can the consciousness of her own innocence and purity console her under such a trial. She would fain have all, with whom she may chance to come in contact, believe in that virtue, on which even a doubt inflicts a wound not easily to be healed; and to bear, however unmerited, the suspicion of guilt, is torture.

"Good Heavens!" thought Selina, "is there, then, no safety for the youthful and unprotected? Can the wilful, bad conduct of a man, over whom I could exercise no control, entail on me such direful consequences. They (referring to the ladies in Brook-street) not only scrupled not to insinuate a belief in my culpability, but refused to listen to aught in the shape of my justification; and yet what could I have urged? I could but have told the simple truth; but how little would that have availed with them. The bare acknowledgment that Lord Almondbury had addressed

his libertine views to me, had presumed to insult my ears by his base proposals, would have led them to think that never would he have so dared, had not some levity on my part given him encouragement. How did I shrink from making the distressing avowal to my kind friend, Mrs. Vernon, though certain of her predisposition to judge favourably of me."

Such were the reflections that occupied the mind of Selina, as she was driven through the streets, her waist encircled by the arm of her kind friend, who truly sympathized in her sorrow, and who uttered all that could alleviate her distress. "Those who could judge so harshly and unjustly, my dear Miss Stratford, must be ungenerous, and predisposed to evil. You must not allow their malice to make you unhappy. You will never again, in all human probability, encounter these persons; and pray think no more of them," said the worthy woman. But the advice was more easily to be given than followed. Selina for many days could think of nothing else than that two women existed, of whom, until the hour she entered their house, she knew nothing, whom she never could have offended, yet who entertained towards her sentiments of a hostile nature, founded on a belief in conduct, on her part, which she would die rather than have merited.

How strange are the occurrences in life! A few hours before, had any one told her that, ere night, she should shed bitter tears, caused by persons she had never then seen, she would have disbelieved the possibility; yet here she now was, bowed down by indignation and wounded delicacy, at a charge rather hinted, than openly made, by total strangers, to whom she should never have an opportunity of vindicating her innocence. Proud as Selina naturally was, she would have submitted to almost any humiliation to exonerate her character, so highly did she estimate the blessing of an unspotted and unsuspected reputation.

When Mr. Vernon returned home in the evening, and noticed the traces of tears on the fair young face he had seen so blooming in the morning, his wife told him of the cause. "Poor dear young creature!" said the worthy man. "Were the ladies plain?"

"Yes; but what had that to do with their harshness?" replied his wife.

"More, much more, than you imagine, my dear. Ugly women, unless blessed with a greater share of goodness than generally falls to the share of most in that predicament, are prone to judge severely of those who possess youth and beauty, two advantages which are always the objects of their envy. *They wished* to think ill of Miss Stratford, merely because she is young and handsome; had she been ill-favoured they would have judged her less uncharitably."

"And can such hardness of heart be?" demanded Mrs. Vernon. "Jealousy and envy ever act on the heart as petrifying waters do on other substances."

"They harden it for ever," was the reply.

Although rendered more timid than before, and painfully nervous at the thought of again presenting herself to strangers as a candidate to fill the place of governess, Selina felt that she must not eat the bread of idleness, or remain a tax on the hospitality of her kind friends. She carefully read over the long columns of advertisements in the "Times," in search of some one that might hold out a prospect of suiting her; but for some days this search was unsuccessful. There is something in an advertisement, a physiognomy, if I may be allowed so to express it, which, as the human countenance unveils the character of its owner, betrays that of the writer. From how many of those columns, filled up by specifications required, and headed by the word "*Wanted*," in large capitals, did Selina turn away disappointed and dispirited. One of the writers was, she felt certain, proud and austere; another, vulgar; a third mean and sordid; and all, more or less, exacting. She blamed her own over fastidiousness; repeated to herself that it was not for her to expect to meet again such a patroness as the one of which death had robbed her, and that she must not give way to the nervous dread she felt growing in her mind, but without loss of time, seek a situation. Once more she took up the newspaper, and selecting one of the advertisements that struck her as being the least objectionable, that is, in which least accomplishments and perfections were required, and salary not mentioned, and addressed a letter to the initials and street named. This step taken, her thoughts reverted to the past, and thence

came back to the present and future. What sort of family might this be into which she had offered to enter? How painful to seek a home with utter strangers, whose manners and minds might be so totally dissimilar to her own, that a daily contact with them might be anything but agreeable. Yet such must ever be the lot of a governess, who is expected to bestow not only her accomplishments, and the fruits of her education on those she is paid for instructing, but also to mould her manners, if not her sentiments, to suit those of the parents whose hardly-earned bread she is to eat, and whose sordid remuneration of her services, she is expected to be thankful for. The more she reflected on this subject, the less courage did she feel for a new trial, and yet it must be made. She must meet cold looks, answer stern questions, and submit to be treated rather as a criminal before her judge, than a well-educated and stainless woman, seeking a maintenance by the exercise of her abilities in an honourable calling.

Again she went forth; but this time she directed her steps to no aristocratic street. The answer to her note appointed her to call at ten o'clock the following day at No. — Allsop Terrace, New Road. A boy about eleven or twelve years old, opened the door, and having inquired whether she was the person come after "the governess's place," gave her ingress. Clothed in a faded suit of green cloth made in the form of a close vest and trousers, the jacket ornamented with three rows of brass sugar-loaf buttons, which had long lost their lustre, this boy, designed by his employers to represent that appendage of an expensive establishment, denominated a page, was, in reality, the only male domestic in the house. His whole appearance bore evidence to this fact; for his face looked as if water seldom came in contact with it; his hair was in a disorder more calculated for picturesque effect, than tidiness or good order; his black neck-cloth had grown into a reddish brown, and his boots were pierced in various places. An extreme obliquity of vision, increased the natural ugliness of this youth, and a sharpness of manner amounting to impertinence, testified that good breeding was not much attended to in the house in which he fulfilled the multifarious duties of porter, butler, footman and errand-boy.

"Missis is up stairs, and if you follow me I'll show you the way to her," said the youth of all-work, rapidly mounting the stairs at the other side of the hall. He ascended so nimbly, that Selina found it impossible to keep pace with him, though she toiled up the narrow and steep stairs as quickly as she could, as her panting breath testified.

"Come along Miss, come along," said the elfin page, "missis can't abide slow people;" and before Selina had reached the landing-place, he threw open the door of a room which opened on it, and elevating his voice, exclaimed — "If you please Ma'am, here be the person as is comed after the governess's place."

"Why doesn't she come in?" said a gruff and most disagreeable voice, in return.

"She ha'n't got up the stairs yet," was the reply.

"Then why keep the door open, you fool? except to give me my death by cold."

The boy muttered an unintelligible reply, and Selina entered the dining-room — seated by a table covered with various pieces of linen, divers pairs of stockings, some children's frocks, and muslin habit-shirts, forming altogether a heterogeneous and formidable heap of litter, was a woman about forty years of age, whose dress denoted that little care had been devoted to it. This personage had once been a blonde, with pretensions to beauty, and the flaxen hair which fell in long ringlets over the cheeks, were down to her large bust, rendered the complexion peculiar to very fair women, when arrived at a certain age, still more remarkable. A red circle occupied the place of eyebrows, while the scanty eyelashes, "few and far between," were nearly white, and lent a very disagreeable expression to the light grey eyes beneath them which peered with almost feline slyness on the face of Selina.

"You are Y. Z., I suppose?" said the mistress of the house, "and I am F. G. Sit down, for I have many questions to ask, and they will take some time to be answered, for one can't be too cautious now-a-days, when so many impostors are going about, who *are lets enter one's house.* Who is this person?" enquired the *speaker, rudely pointing* to Mrs. Vernon.

"*The friend* with whom I reside, Madam."

"You had better sit down also," said F. G., for the real name of the lady had not yet been revealed, and she nodded to a chair, placed with a row of others formally against the wall of the room.

"You undertake to teach French, Italian, German, and all other languages, I suppose," demanded F. G.

"No, Madam, not German," was the reply.

"And why not pray? you might as well have learnt that, when you were learning other languages."

No reply being made to this observation, the lady again resumed the category. "You can draw, and paint, of course, and do every kind of needle-work?"

"I draw tolerably," was the modest answer.

"But can't you paint in oil? that I consider indispensable, for I want to have pictures for my room. I like pictures, and those you will paint while teaching my daughters, could be hung up, for as I will have to pay for the canvass, colours, and for your time, I will naturally expect that the pictures are to be mine."

"I am sorry that I do not paint in oil."

"Well, for a governess setting up to teach every thing, I think it's very strange that you shouldn't be able to paint in oil, or to teach German. This must of course make a considerable difference in your salary. I hope you perfectly understand plain work, and can do it quickly, for I expect all the children's clothes to be kept in repair, as well as made by their governess, as also that she will lend a hand to mending the house linen, and altering my dresses."

Mrs. Vernon looked at Selina in a mode to imply her desire, that her young friend should at once decline the situation, where so much was required, and so little comfort could be expected, but prepared to find objections present themselves in every family where she might offer her services, and anxious not to continue to be a burden on the kind friends she was staying with, Selina determined, if possible, to close with the terms of F. G., and by patience and zeal in fulfilling the duties of her office, render it at least supportable.

"What salary do you expect?" enquired F. G.

"Sixty guineas a-year, Madam."

"Sixty guineas a-year!" reiterated the mistress of the house, letting her work drop into her lap, and raising her hands to mark her astonishment at so enormous a sum being expected. "Well, I never heard of such a salary being asked, and that too, by a person who acknowledges that she doesn't know German, and can't paint in oils. Fifty pounds a-year; *mind*, pounds, *not* guineas, is the utmost I intend to give, even to a person who will undertake to teach German and painting in oil, two indispensable requisites in my opinion, in the education of young ladies. If you are disposed to accept forty pounds a-year, I deduct ten on account of your not knowing German and oil-painting, I have no objection to your entering my family."

Again Mrs. Vernon looked at Selina, and expressed, as strongly as looks could do, her desire that she should decline the situation; but her young friend, to her surprise and regret, accepted it, and it was agreed that she should enter on her new duties the following week.

"And now," said the lady, who had announced that her name was Mrs. Jefferson, "to whom am I to refer for your abilities and character?"

"I have a strong recommendation from the only situation I ever held, and which I left in consequence of the death of the lady."

"But her children, your pupils, didn't also die, I suppose," observed Mrs. Jefferson sharply.

"Why didn't you continue with them?"

"I declined doing so, Madam, because I did not wish to live in a house where no lady presided."

"You acted very properly. And so the recommendation you have is from the gentleman, the widower?"

"Yes, Madam."

"I would prefer a recommendation from a lady."

"I can answer for the morals, and conduct of Miss Stratford, Madam," said Mrs. Vernon,

"What relation are you to her, pray?"

"None whatever, Madam, but I know her well, and can conscientiously recommend her."

"But as you are a perfect stranger to me, you cannot be surprised if I ask you for a reference."

"The clergyman of the parish in which I have resided thirty-five years, will, I am sure, Madam, satisfy you with regard to my respectability; and if you permit me, I will write his address on my card."

"Yes, that will do very well, you'll find pen and ink on that table;" and Mrs. Jefferson pointed to a table near the window, which Mrs. Vernon approached, and wrote the address on.

"Be sure to be here early on Monday morning, Miss — what did you say your name is?"

"Stratford, Madam."

"Stratford! any relation to the family of that name in Norfolk?"

"No, Madam."

"I thought not, and I'm glad of it; for they are a proud, haughty set. You may go now; but remember Monday morning. I like punctuality, and expect to find it in every one in my establishment;" and, nodding her head, she motioned to the door, as a signal for the departure of her visitors, who took their leave.

"How could you, my dear Miss Stratford, engage with a woman whose appearance and manners offer so little promise of comfort in her house, and on terms, too, so very disadvantageous?" asked Mrs. Vernon, almost in a reproachful tone.

"I must confess that the abode does not seem very tempting," replied Selina; "but still it is less disagreeable to me to close at once even with this engagement, unpromising as it is, than have to go to other houses, and be subjected to the annoyances always attending such occasions."

The inquiries of Mrs. Jefferson having been satisfactorily answered by the clergyman, to whom they were addressed, Selina, on the appointed day, much to the regret of her kind host and hostess, bade farewell to them, and proceeded to her new abode.

"Remember, my dear Miss Stratford," said both husband and wife, "that should our fears, as to the comfort of the *situation* you have accepted, be realized, you have always a home here

to which you will ever be cordially welcomed, and where your presence will ever diffuse joy."

These proofs of a friendship so valuable, were most soothing to the feelings of her to whom they were offered, and armed her with courage to support whatever annoyances she might have to encounter in the family she was about to enter.

"You are later than I expected," were the first words addressed to her by Mrs. Jefferson on her arrival. "As you are so late, you have, of course, had your luncheon; so, while, we are eating ours, you can go and arrange your things in your room. Thomas, Thomas, why don't you answer when you are called?"

"Vy, Ma'am, I vas a getting the luncheon, and I can't be in two places at vunce."

"Haven't I told you a dozen times that you must not make answers. Its very vulgar."

"Then, vat's I to do ven you axes me questions, Ma'am?"

"There, go along, you stupid lout; and send Kitty to show Miss Stratford her room, and you must help her up with her luggage."

Thomas stopped at the top of the kitchen-stairs, and screamed as loud as he could for Kitty, who, after a few calls, was heard ascending from the lower regions, muttering her dissatisfaction *soto voce*.

"One never can have a moment's quiet, nor a meal in peace,' muttered Kitty. "I wish I was back in my last place, I am sure. *That was* something like a place, where there was a reg'lar footman kept, as well as a teaboy."

"Missis says you are to show the new governess to her room, and that I am to help you to carry up her traps."

"How am I to help to carry up such a big trunk as that there, I should like to know? why it would strain my back. I think people might have some conscience and pity for poor servants, instead of having trunks that would take a couple of porters to move about," observed Kitty, glancing angrily at Selina, who, slipping a shilling into her hand, and another into that of the boy, soon vanquished the objections of both to perform the service she required, and rendered them very civil.

"Sure, Thomas, it's nothing after all," said Kitty, lifting the trunk with perfect ease. "Follow me, Miss, if you please; take care of the turn, for the stairs are mighty narrow at the corner."

On the third floor, Kitty and the boy entered a small room, so utterly destitute of all comfort, that Selina, whose expectations were very moderate, drew back involuntarily, as she cast her eyes over the wretched room.

"You may well stare, Miss," said Kitty; "for this is no fit room for a genteel young lady like you. It was very well for the last governess, who was no more a lady than I am, and who never showed us the colour of her money while she was in the house; but for you, Miss, who have behaved so genteel, I'm quite ashamed to put you into such a hole."

"Von't you have a bit of summat to eat, Miss?" asked Thomas.

"Do, Miss," added Kitty, "I advise you; for if missis *can* cheat you out of your reg'lar meals she *will*, I can assure you. I know she half-starved the governess that was here last."

"Thomas, Thomas, — Kitty, Kitty, what are you about?" screamed Mrs. Jefferson.

"Coming, Ma'am, — coming," answered both servants, as they rapidly retreated from the chamber of Selina, and descended the stairs.

Selina glanced around the miserable chamber assigned to her, with a shudder of disgust she could not conquer. So low, that she could hardly stand upright in it, and only lighted by one small window, nothing could be more dreary and dingy than the aspect of this room. The paper hung from the humid wall in several places, and so defaced was the pattern and colours by damp, that it would be difficult to guess the original design or hue. The small window had no curtain, and in that point perfectly corresponded with the bed, which, with its soiled counterpane, scarcely covering the still more soiled blankets and matresses, offered anything but a tempting place of repose. A broken mirror, of small dimensions, stood on a deal table, and a cracked jug and basin filled a ricketty wash-hand stand. Such

was the dormitory assigned to the governess, — a chamber that would, in most respectable families, be considered too bad for a servant holding one of the lowest situations in the kitchen. It boded little of good to its new occupant, who determined, however, to make the best of it, immediately set about arranging her clothes and books, — no easy task, a very small wooden chest of drawers on three legs, being the only piece of furniture in the room to receive them. In about an hour she was summoned to the presence of Mrs. Jefferson, who, with two very plain girls of nine and eight years old, she presented to Miss Stratford as her pupils. They had very red hair, and one squinted exceedingly; a misfortune, as their mother stated, to be attributed solely to Julia's imitating that infirmity in Thomas, the page.

"Matilda you will find a very docile pupil," said Mrs. Jefferson. "Indeed she is, if anything, too quiet, while Julia is extremely lively. This is the school-room."

An apartment little larger than a closet, lighted by a window in the roof, and heated by a small stove, which the discoloured paper on the walls proved to smoke, was the wretched den where Selina and her pupils were to pass the days.

"You will dine with me when I have no company," said Mrs. Jefferson, assuming a dignified air, "and when I have, you will be expected to play and sing to amuse the party."

While the mother was speaking, both the little girls were closely examining the countenance of their new governess. The elder one with a stupid stare of wonder, and the younger with a cool effrontery, with which no inconsiderable portion of sylness and cunning were mingled.

"Look, mamma," exclaimed she, "what a pretty gown Miss Stratford has, and what a nice collar and cuffs; why she is much smarter than you are, mamma."

"Hold your tongue, child! Have I not told you that you are not to make personal remarks?"

"But you said at lunch that she was much too smartly dressed, and that her gown was better than yours."

Mrs. Jefferson's face flushed with anger, and she again told Miss Julia *to be silent*, adding a denial of the child's assertion.

This, however, was not the mode to silence the young lady, who, anxious to establish her own veracity, pertinaciously adhered to her statement, adding,

"Yes, mamma, you *did* say Miss Stratford's gown was better than yours, and also, that governesses had no business to be better dressed than ladies."

"You really are incorrigible, and merit a good box on the ear, you little tiresome thing," said Mrs. Jefferson, now crimson with rage; Miss Julia, nothing daunted, was on the point of again vindicating her own veracity, when Selina interposed, and told her to be silent.

"What, when mamma tells stories, and denies what she said? Matilda heard her as well as I did, didn't you, Matilda?"

Matilda looked more stupid than before, and after a moments pause, observed that she never remembered any thing that was said.

"That 's because you are a stupid fool, as mamma often says," replied the spoilt Julia.

"Every one calls me stupid," said Matilda, "but I can't help it," and here the poor girl burst into tears.

"See, you naughty girl, how you have made your poor sister cry. You ought to be ashamed of yourself," said Mrs. Jefferson.

"I only repeated what you continually say," replied Julia, addressing herself to her mother, who dreading a continuation of her impertinence, left the room, recommending before she closed the door, that Miss Stratford should severely correct her for insubordination.

To the grave lecture pronounced by Selina, her hopeful pupil listened with little more deference than she had evinced towards the reproofs of her mother. She attempted several times to interrupt the discourse of her governess by rude observations, and by her waywardness and obstinacy convinced her teacher, that to *subdue* so wilful a temper, and reduce her to obedience, would *be indeed* no easy task. While the grave reproof was being given, *Miss Jefferson* sat with a vacant stare, that indicated how little *she comprehended* its import, and when at last appealed to by

Selina, whether she did not think her yonnger sister's conduct very blameable? she replied,

"I don't know, Miss. I didn't know it was wrong of Julia to repeat what mamma said. Our governess who went away said we must never tell a lie, and yet mamma and you are very angry that sister spoke the truth. I 'm sure I don't know who is right, nor who is wrong, do I Julia?"

"No, to be sure you don't poor Matty. How should you. You know every one says you are a fool."

"Hi, hi, hi," sobbed Matilda, "Julia is always calling me a fool, and I don't like being called a fool, hi, hi, hi, and I *won't* be called a fool, that I won't."

"Miss Julia, it is highly improper of you to speak so rudely to your sister. I won't permit it," observed Selina gravely.

"But she *is* a fool," retorted the incorrigible Julia, "and as I only said the truth, I think you are very cross and ill-natured to scold me."

"Where are your books, young ladies?" inquired Selina.

"They are all torn to pieces," replied Matilda, "I saw Julia tear them up yesterday."

"You helped me Matty, you know you did."

"Because you said I must tear them with you, and then we should have no more lessons to learn."

"Then I must inform your mother, young ladies," and Selina left the room to acquaint Mrs. Jefferson of the fact revealed by that lady's eldest daughter. This new proof of the bad conduct of her children produced great anger on the part of the mother, who far from attributing their errors to their true source, namely, her own improper indulgence to the younger, proclaimed herself to be the most unfortunate parent in the world to have such troublesome, ill-behaved girls. Having pronounced strong censure on them, mingled with many laudations on her own goodness, she inquired if Miss Stratford had not any books that might replace those destroyed the previous day. Being told she had not, *Mrs. Jefferson* said, "Well, then, put down on paper the *books you require*, but let them be as few as possible, and to-*morrow I will go out* to a book stall, and see if I can't buy some

cheap; and in the mean time, that you should not be idle, here's some linen to mend, and while you are at work, you can scold the children, which will do them good. Always utilise your time as I do, for while I work, my eyes and fingers only being employed, I can use my tongue, and always take that opportunity to scold the children and servants."

CHAPTER XXII.

Unwilling that her pupils should pass the day in idleness, Selina proposed giving them some needle-work, but found that great an adept as was their mother in this homely but useful art, they were wholly ignorant of even the most simple part of it, and nay, more, evinced a positive disinclination to learn it, they commenced whispering and laughing together; Miss Julia making it evident by her repeated glances at her governess, that *she* furnished the subject of her mirth, and when told to be silent, stoutly defended her right to speak. Selina looked around for a book, in order to employ her wayward pupil in reading aloud, but none was to be found; and when adopting their mother's advice to correct them, she firmly but calmly reproved them for their rudeness, Miss Julia commenced making the most fearful grimaces at her, which set Miss Jefferson into screams of laughter. Heavily and gloomily passed that long day. It seemed interminable to the poor governess; but at length she was summoned to dinner, and the maid-servant who gave her the intimation that the repast was served in the dining-room, acquainted her that she was expected to smoothe the young ladies' hair, wash their faces and hands, and see that they were tidy.

"But mind Miss, if you please, you mustn't keep missis waiting for a moment, for she 's mighty pertiklar about having people ready for dinner, and makes sich an ado about it, that it 's quite vexing to hear how she 'll go on sometimes."

Selina, greatly flurried by this intelligence, endeavoured to *make her* pupils a little more presentable for the dining-room, to *which operation* on her part, they were strongly opposed, and *offered such* resistance, that fifteen minutes were occupied in

what might have been accomplished in half that time, and having merely snatched a moment to wash her own hands, she hurried to the dining-room.

"This will never do, I can assure you," said Mrs. Jefferson, her mouth so filled with food that her utterance was nearly impeded, and her face extremely flushed. Mr. Jefferson, for so Selina concluded the gentleman at the bottom of the table to be, betrayed no symptom of recognizing her presence, except by raising his eyes from his plate, and staring rudely at her, while he continued to eat his dinner with an appetite that a *gourmand* might envy, however he might despise the coarse fare that satisfied it. A soiled table cloth, bearing sundry proofs of the partiality of its owners to mustard, and of their carelessness in helping gravy, was covered by delf plates and dishes of the commonest kind. At the top of the table was a dish of very greasy looking hash, in which onions formed a component part, and at the bottom was a boiled breast of mutton so covered with fat as to vouch for the skill in feeding of the seller. A dish of mashed turnips of so dark a hue as to leave no doubt that the place of milk had been supplied by water in their culinary preparation, was flanked by a dish of potatoes on which steam had done its worst, leaving only certain crushed and clammy substances adhering to the dish, whence it was no easy task to remove them.

"Cut some mutton for the children," said Mrs. Jefferson to her *caro sposo*. "You need not give them much; for they ate a good luncheon."

"I had only some cold pork, and it was so nasty I couldn't eat it," observed Miss Julia, putting up her lip, and pouting.

"And I had only a potatoe," said Miss Jefferson, with a very doleful expression of countenance.

"No one wants to know what you have had," replied the affectionate father, gruffly; "but I know by my butcher's bills that a little does not satisfy you."

"I want some hash, I can't eat that nasty fat mutton," whined Miss Julia.

"*Then go without*," was the rejoinder of her papa.

"*Give Miss Stratford some mutton*," said Mrs. Jefferson.

helping herself at the same time to a large supply of the hash, which whether by accident or design, she never offered Selina, who thoroughly disgusted with the appearance of the whole dinner, was strongly tempted to decline accepting the offered slice of fat mutton. She feared, however, that if she did so, she might give offence, and be accused of being over dainty; so she tried to find some portion of lean amid the mass of fat, and not discovering any, quietly abstained from eating, contenting herself with a morsel of the very small piece of coarse bread placed by her plate.

"You should have said you were not hungry, and not have allowed yourself to be helped to a large slice of mutton," observed her uncivilized hostess. "It is very extravagant and wasteful, and those who have to earn their bread ought *to* know better."

"The mutton is rather too fat," said Mr. Jefferson, casting an admiring glance on the fair face of the governess, whose beauty began to thaw the ice around his heart.

The glance was not lost on his watchful wife, although it had wholly escaped the notice of her to whom it was directed, and growing red with anger, she asserted "that the mutton was not at all too fat, and she wondered how *some* people could be so foolish as to encourage the false delicacy of *other* people," looking, as she spoke, first at her husband, and then at Selina.

"Give me some porter, and mind you froth it well," said Mrs. Jefferson. The boy did as he was told, and then, unbidden, was about to pour some porter into the glass of Selina, when his mistress exclaimed — "Stop, stop, what are you about? Don't you know that the governesses never have porter or beer?"

The boy's face revealed that even *he* was shocked at the sordidness of his mistress, and Mr. Jefferson, little used as he was to interfere in the domestic arrangements of his wife, ventured to say, "that, as Miss Stratford had so little dinner, perhaps she might like a little porter."

Rage sparkled in the small eyes of the hostess, who, suspecting the cause of this extraordinary liberality on the part of her *spouse*, observed, that "if Miss Stratford chose to go without

her dinner, that was *her* affair; and she thought, for her part, that malt-liquor was very improper for young women, and was only fit for those who had the cares of a family on their hands."

Selina assured her "that water was her usual beverage, and that she preferred it to all others;" but the blush that rose to her cheek, while uttering this truth, increased the attraction of her countenance so much, that Mrs. Jefferson, again detecting the truant eyes of her husband fixed on it, angrily declared "*she* cared not whether water was, or was not, the preferred beverage of her governess, but that, for her part, no governess, however *some* people might admire her, should have malt-liquor in her house."

Mr. Jefferson seemed astonished at this open display of the pervading weakness of his wife, and Miss Julia, who saw that her mother was angry, with greater *naiveté* than tact, observed, "Lawk, how funny! Mamma was very angry with Thomas for offering to help the governess to porter; and now, she is more angry, because Miss Stratford said she would not like to drink any thing but water."

"Hold your tongue, you little stupid creature!" replied Mrs. Jefferson; "there really is no bearing that chatter-box."

"Yes, I must say Julia is much too flippant," observed Mr. Jefferson; "but now that she has got a good governess," and he looked very graciously at Selina, "I doubt not she will soon improve."

"And pray, Mr. Jefferson, how do you know whether she has a good governess or not, I should like to know?" said his angry wife. "You never saw Miss Stratford before half an hour ago, yet you instantly take for granted that she must be a good governess forthwith."

"I concluded, my dear," replied the henpecked husband, "that, with your sagacity and powers of discrimination, you would not engage any one who was not fully capable of the task undertaken."

"No, Mr. Jefferson; it was no such thing; I know you better, and am not to be imposed on by your hypocritical speeches. You judged Miss Stratford so mighty favourably, merely because she happens to have what you men call a pretty face."

"Well, my dear; don't you know that the phrase goes, that 'a handsome face is the best letter of recommendation?'"

"Handsome face, Mr. Jefferson! You ought to be ashamed of yourself — that's what you ought! and before your children too! Take the children away, Miss Stratford; I wonder you waited to be told to do so!" and the speaker's face became crimson with anger. "A little sense or delicacy might have taught you the impropriety of allowing your pupils to remain present, while their father addressed such improper language to you, and in presence of their ill-used mother, too."

Selina was struck dumb by this unexpected rebuke; she felt how insulting it was, and wished to disclaim every part in the dispute; but, too much hurt to be able to speak with the coolness and self-possession befitting such an occasion, she arose, and, making a sign to her pupils to follow, left the room, — the loud voice of Mrs. Jefferson, in violent anger, reaching her ears even in the school-room.

"I'm so glad," said Miss Julia, clapping her hands; "papa will get a good trimming now, I'm sure. What a rage mamma was in! I hope she'll give papa a good dressing — that's what I do! for he took her part against me, when she called me a chatter-box."

"Hold your tongue, Miss Julia," said her governess.

"Is this the way?" demanded the incorrigible girl, applying her finger and thumb to her tongue, which vulgar pleasantry set her elder sister into shouts of laughter.

"No, Miss; it is not the way. Take your hand from your mouth, and remain silent."

"There's no pleasing you, I see," replied the spoilt child; "you told me to hold my tongue, and when I hold it you find fault with me. How should I hold it, except with my hand, I should like to know?"

"If you speak again I will punish you."

When Selina was summoned to tea, she found Mrs. Jefferson alone; but the calm now observable in her countenance betrayed that it was the lull that follows a storm; and that the storm had been a violent one she could not doubt, from the traces it had left behind.

"I am to have company to-morrow evening," said she; "and wish you to put some trimming on my dress, and also to make me a turban out of this scarf;" and the lady held up a very tarnished tinsel scarf, more fit to figure among the finery of the sweeps on May-day, than on the head of any one with pretensions to gentility.

"I do not at all understand millinery, Madam, and never attempted to make a head-dress in my life."

"Well, then, the sooner you begin the better. You must do it as well as you can, that 's all, I 'm not very particular."

"I am really afraid, Madam, that I cannot execute the task to your satisfaction."

"Not if you make up your mind before hand, to do it carelessly, as I see you have."

Selina took the scarf, determined to fashion it into a turban as well as she could, and then Mrs. Jefferson intimated her desire, that she should be prepared to exert her talents to amuse the expected company.

"You must be in good voice," added Mrs. Jefferson, "for there is nothing I detest so much, as persons who, when they are asked to play and sing, begin preluding over the keys of the piano-forte, and clearing their throats."

"This last operation is, however, sometimes unavoidable, Madam," replied Selina, "the nerves often compel it."

"Why, what can the nerves have to do with the throat, or voice, I should like to know," demanded Mrs. Jefferson.

"They exert considerable influence over both, I believe," observed Selina.

"Stuff, nonsense. You may as well assert that my nerves could prevent my speaking if I have a mind to talk, as that your's could prevent you singing if you were disposed to do so. Let me hear no more about nerves, if you wish to continue in my family, for I consider nerves as another name for idleness and affectation, and greatly dislike all persons who urge them as an excuse for the non-performance of the duties they are expected to fulfil. Pour out the tea," said Mrs. Jefferson, "and cut me some thin slices off the French roll, with butter from the small pat. If you like to have

anything to eat, there is some excellent brown bread and salt butter, which I recommend you.. Brown bread does not agree with me, otherwise I prefer it."

The stale loaf did not tempt the appetite of Selina, and she thought that Mrs. Jefferson appeared pleased with her abstemiousness.

"You are a little eater, I see," said that lady, "and you are right; nothing conduces to health more than a spare diet. Half the ailments to which people are subject, are occasioned by repletion."

How strange, thought Selina, that her practice should so wholly differ from her theory, for while speaking, Mrs. Jefferson was devouring the bread and butter cut for her, as greedily as if she had not eaten a very hearty dinner.

"I wonder you take sugar and milk in your tea," observed Mrs. Jefferson; "both are now proved to be unwholesome, and I know many people who have left them off. Young women ought to do so before habit has rendered either necessary, and more especially those who have to earn their bread. If, however, you can't dispense with sugar, I will have some moist for your use, for loaf sugar is now so dear that no one in my house, except Mr. Jefferson and myself, indulge in it."

This hint effectually prevented Selina from taking a second cup of tea, and her hostess having observed that she was unemployed, recommended her to resume her needle.

"I can't bear seeing people sitting idle," said she, "and never was there a truer line than that which says —

'Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do.'

Suppose you begin to make the turban — here are some pins, with the aid of which, you can get it into shape, and I can try it on. If it becomes me, you can stitch it together afterwards."

"I shall require a form for it, Madam."

"Have you nothing among your own things that would make a form?"

"Nothing whatever, Madam."

"Ring the bell then, and I 'll send out Thomas to a shop round the corner."

Thomas made his appearance, and was told by his mistress that he must run to the aforesaid shop, and buy her half-a-yard of catgut, a yard of ribbon wire, and, she added, "tell Mrs. Dobson it is to make a turban, and be sure you beat down the price."

"Vy, Ma'am, she as good as turned me out of the shop the last time I vent there, for offering her as you told me to do—half what she asked."

Thomas returned in due time, and laid his purchases with the bill on the table.

"What an extravagant charge," said his mistress, examining the items; "Mrs. Dobson does not really know what to demand. Here 's eightpence to pay; but if you had not been a stupid, as well as an extravagant fellow, you might have got it for half the money."

"I said all I could to her, Ma'am. I told her 't was to dish up a turbot for company to-morrow, and she laughed and said, as how she never heard of catgut or ribbon wire being wanted for a turbot before."

"Was there ever such a fool?" exclaimed his angry mistress.

"If I vosn't a 'prentice, I know vhat I 'd do," muttered Thomas, "for it 's no manner of use trying to give satisfaction!"

"Leave the room instantly, you saucy fool. How dare you be so impudent!"

The lad withdrew, slamming the door violently after him, which act of insubordination, led to Mrs. Jefferson's giving a long detail of the unkindness, ingratitude, and baseness of servants in general, but of Thomas in particular, while Selina plied her fingers in the formation of the turban.

The next day was a busy one in the house. The noise of preparation commenced at an early hour. The voice of Mrs. Jefferson might be heard in angry debate with Kitty, Thomas, and a charwoman, called in on company days; and Mr. Jefferson, so seldom seen, except at meals, kept coming in and going out several times, each of his visits occasioning an increased commotion in the lower

regions. "There, just like you, Mr. Jefferson," said his angry wife. "Who but you would have bought such expensive fish?"

"I assure you I got it very cheap, my dear."

"What do you call cheap, I should like to know?"

"I only gave two shillings for the two pair of soles."

"Ninepence a pair would have been plenty."

"Really, my dear, I can't lose half an hour higgling about sixpence."

"Your time is so vastly precious, I suppose. And what did you pay for the chickens?"

"Three shillings a couple. You can't call that dear, I 'm sure?"

"You might have got them for half-a-crown, for they 're none of the freshest, I can tell you."

"You expect things for nothing, my dear; ay, and good things too."

"No, Mr. Jefferson, I do no such thing, I only expect the value of my money. Have you put the bottle of gooseberry wine into cold water? You might have persuaded the fishmonger to have thrown you in fourpence worth of ice, which would have made the gooseberry wine pass perfectly for Champagne; but you have no thought or cleverness in those matters, and everything falls on my shoulders. Mind you put a little brandy, and a squeeze of a lemon, into a couple of the bottles of Cape Madeira, and have the Sherry label put on them, and the Madeira label on the plain. Don't keep pressing people to drink wine, Mr. Jefferson. It 's a vulgar, as well as an extravagant habit. The only one to be pressed is a certain person;" and she looked mysteriously at her husband, and then in the direction of the servants, to explain why she did not name the individual to whom she did not grudge the wine. "It 's a different thing with regard to her," resumed Mrs. Jefferson; "for, if we play our cards as we ought, *she* will leave us the means to enjoy ourselves for the rest of our lives."

The dinner served to Selina and her pupils on that day was so scanty in quantity, and so bad in quality, that Miss Julia protested loudly against their being put off with such bad fare. Mrs. Jefferson had arranged that Miss Stratford and her pupils should be in

the drawing-room when the ladies retired there from the dining-room, and that Selina was to preside at the tea-table. "But, mind," added that prudent woman, "you don't let Matilda or Julia eat any of the cakes; I have bought only enough for the company: and don't let the candles be lighted until you hear us on the stairs, for it's no use having them flaring in the room for nothing."

The scanty dinner served to Selina and her pupils had rendered these last so ravenous, that great was the difficulty she experienced in preventing them from seizing and devouring the cakes laid on the tea-table. Miss Julia repeatedly attempted to snatch them, and endeavoured to induce her sister to join in the attack, declaring aloud, that "if Matty was not such a fool, she might possess herself of the cakes while Miss Stratford was occupied in keeping her from them."

CHAPTER XXIII.

At length the ladies entered the drawing-room with flushed faces, and considerable animation of manner. "What an excellent dinner we have had, my dear Mrs. Jefferson," said one of them.

"Mrs. Jefferson's dinners are always good," observed another. "You must have a very superior cook."

"I am glad you think so, Mrs. Willcocks; but I assure you that even the best cooks are not to be trusted. I superintend all the made dishes myself."

"And you are quite right; there is nothing like the eye of a mistress" observed a very fat lady, dressed in a green gown and red turban.

"I thought your wine remarkably good," said another of the visitants, "particularly the Sherry and Champagne; and I am a very good judge, I can tell you:" and a great consumer, too, might, without much chance of any breach of veracity, be added, if the conclusion might be drawn from the flushed face, loud voice and unsteady gait of the speaker.

"I am so glad *you* liked the wine, my dear friend," replied Mrs. Jefferson, with her most insinuating smile. "I told Mr.

Jefferson that he must provide the very best, for that you could not drink any other."

"So here are the young ladies," observed the lady, to whom it was evident Mrs. Jefferson attached the most importance.

"Matty, Julia, why do you not go up to your dear, kind friend, and kiss her directly?" said their mother.

But while the girls approached to perform mamma's wishes, the person they were commanded to embrace stood motionless, staring rudely at Selina, who instantly recognised Mrs. Forsythe.

"Why, Lord bless me! how long have you been here?" demanded she, with an authoritative air.

"Two days, Madam," replied Selina.

"Well, I 'm glad to find you earning your bread *honestly*," laying a peculiar stress on the word honestly, "and not leading a life of idleness."

Mrs. Jefferson approached, with a look of alarm, and the other ladies appeared to anticipate an explosion of some kind, for they glanced with undisguised curiosity from Mrs. Forsythe to Selina, whose simple, but tasteful, toilette, and pretty face, had excited more envy than good will in their breasts. "And so you know Miss Stratford?" said Mrs. Jefferson.

"Yes, I *do* know her," was the answer, accompanied by a shake of the head, full of import, and by a gravity of countenance that indicated the knowledge was not very favourable to the young lady.

"If I had the least notion that she had the honour of knowing you, my dear friend, I would instantly have applied to you for her character," observed Mrs. Jefferson. "Pray, why did you not tell me that you were known to Mrs. Forsythe?" demanded she.

"I was not aware, Madam, that Mrs. Forsythe was an acquaintance of yours," replied Selina, with a calmness and dignity that ought to have vouched that she could have had no motive for concealment; "and I was not privileged to refer to this lady for a recommendation.

"No, she was *not* privileged, Mrs. Jefferson. I permit no person to use my name, unless I can vouch for every action of their *lives;* and of how few can one speak with certainty!" and Mrs.

Forsythe turned up her eyes to the ceiling, with an appealing glance.

"How very odd!" whispered Mrs. Willcocks to Mrs. Burford, who sat next her.

"Yes, very, indeed!"

"It 's quite like a scene in a play, isn't it? when something is about to be discovered."

"I wonder if the governess will turn out to be a thief?"

"I think it 's more likely that she is something even worse, for she has a very sly countenance, and looks very impudent."

"Yes, so she does. I noticed how bold she looked when she answered Mrs. Jefferson; quite like a stage player: she drew herself up with a grand air."

"You may go and pour out the coffee and tea," said Mrs. Jefferson, with an angry air; and then, turning to her friend with beseeching countenance, she whispered, "I 'm on thorns, yes, positively on thorns, my dear Mrs. Forsythe, to hear all you know of my governess. I 'm sure there must be something wrong, very wrong. I read it in your countenance the moment you spoke to her. You have such an expressive countenance, my dear Mrs. Forsythe, that I can read it like a book."

"Why, the truth is, I can't say much in her favour; that 's the fact. No, she would be very sorry to refer you to me for a character. But I 'd rather say no more. Indeed I would."

"But would it be kind towards me, or towards dear Matty and Julia, who dote on you, my dearest friend, to leave me in ignorance on a point of such importance as the true character of their governess?"

"Use your eyes; observe her well, and there will be no need of my saying anything about her. I 'm by no means ill-natured, and have a dislike to mixing myself up with other people's business; besides, I should not like having an action brought against me for slander. Truth, you know, is now considered a libel; so people must be very cautious what they say."

The gentlemen now joined the ladies, their spirits very much elevated by the fiery wines they had been drinking, and their natural reserve much lessened. They approached the tea-table

where Selina was presiding, and, staring at her with undissembled looks of admiration, formed a circle around it.

"Though I seldom drink tea," said Mr. Willcocks, "I could not resist a cup if offered by such fair hands as this young lady's;" and he simpered and tried to look insinuating.

"The young lady need put no sugar in," observed Mr. Burford, "for her smile is enough to sweeten the tea;" and then he laughed loudly at his own wit.

"Come, come, what business have you old married men to be flocking around a young lady?" asked a Mr. Blayton. "It 's only bachelors like me that are privileged."

"Can I be of any use to you, Miss Stratford?" said Mr. Jefferson, forgetting, in the effect produced on him by the unusual quantity of wine he had drank, that his jealous wife's eyes were upon him.

"I vote for our all turning footmen to this beautiful young lady," said Mr. Willcocks.

"Hi! hi! Oh, Matty, what fun," giggled Miss Julia.

Selina preserved her usual calmness and decorum of demeanour, but the admiration of the half-tipsy men grew so fervent as to render them unconscious that they were offending her.

"Dip your finger in my cup, Miss," said Mr. Burford, dropping on one knee, and holding up his cup; and his burlesque appearance in this position set all the others laughing, and produced shrieks of mirth from the Misses Jefferson.

"Good heavens! what an indecent scene," exclaimed Mrs. Burford. "Well, did you ever!"

"No, never!" replied Mrs. Willcocks. "What a barefaced flirt she must be. O, the men, the men! when they proceed to such extremities in our presence, what would they not do if we were absent?"

"Ah! what indeed? It 's quite dreadful."

"Really, I must put a stop to this shameful conduct," said Mrs. Jefferson, who had been for some time watching with eyes flashing with jealousy, and crimson cheeks, the open look of admiration with which her husband regarded Selina.

"Didn't I tell you to use your eyes, my dear friend," ob-

served Mrs. Forsythe. "Need I enter into any particulars now? you must have seen enough to judge for yourself this evening. Don't be agitated — Mr. Jefferson is, I must own, making a great fool of himself — so all the men are — but forewarned is forearmed, you know."

Mr. Blayford, encouraged by the folly of his companions, dropped on his knees on one side of Selina; Mr. Burford still remaining in a similar posture at the other, and, seizing her hand, attempted to kiss it.

Selina rose from her chair, her cheeks covered with blushes, and, snatching her hand from his grasp, retreated to the other end of the chamber, where the ladies were seated, approached Mrs. Jefferson, and, while attempting to request her interference to check the rudeness of her male guests, burst into tears.

The suddenness with which she snatched her hand from the grasp of Mr. Blayford, caused that gentleman to lose his equilibrium. He fell prostrate on his face, and his wig rolled off; an accident which greatly increased the hilarity of his companions, whose vociferous shouts of laughter rendered every attempt of the female part of the company to speak, inaudible. But no sooner had the men perceived that Selina was in tears than, shocked at having pained her, they, one and all, followed her, entreating for pardon. But even this *amende honorable*, though really well-intentioned, partook, owing to their inebriety, of the ludicrous character of their exaggerated admiration.

"Pray forgive me, loveliest of your sex," stuttered Mr. Blayford; "I would not offend such beauty for worlds."

"Nor I," "Nor I," exclaimed Messrs. Willcocks and Burford.

"No one could be such a brute as to intentionally hurt the feelings of Miss Stratford," said Mr. Jefferson, looking all admiration and regret.

"Hold your tongue, Mr. Jefferson; hold your tongue, I insist. You don't know what you are saying; but you will be sorry enough for this folly to-morrow," said his wife, rage sparkling in her small grey eyes, and glowing in her cheeks.

"And you, Mr. Willcocks, you may well be ashamed of yourself," observed his better half, looking at him most angrily.

"But what have I done?" demanded the accused. "The only crime I plead guilty to is having, and I swear it was unintentional, distressed this young lady, from whose beautiful eyes I would not have drawn a tear for worlds."

"I shall go mad! I shall go positively mad," exclaimed his enraged wife.

"And I," rejoined her husband, "am ready to go down on my knees, and ask the young lady's pardon; though, hang me, if I know for what; but what matters it?—beauty in tears, no man with a heart can resist."

"You are right, Willcocks! Yes, by Jove, you are right," said Mr. Burford. "We ought all to go down on our knees to propitiate such a lovely girl. Never have my eyes gazed on such charms."

"Mr. Burford, Mr. Burford, hold your tongue; you are behaving most improperly, and know not what you say;" and here Mrs. Burford became so agitated that she burst into tears.

While this scene was occurring, Selina stood near Mrs. Jefferson, as if to seek protection from the intoxicated men, from whose approach she shrunk with undisguised disgust and alarm. But she found not the protection she sought, for Mrs. Jefferson's jealousy being excited by the glances of admiration which her husband continued to fix on Miss Stratford, became so angry, that, unable any longer to subdue her temper, she turned angrily to Selina, and ordered her to leave the room.

"Go quickly," said the infuriated woman; "you ought to be ashamed of yourself, to make such an exhibition in the presence of respectable married women, whose husbands you lay your artful snares to entice. Leave the room."

"Come, come," said Mr. Blayford, somewhat sobered by Mrs. Jefferson's anger and injustice, "this young lady must not suffer for our folly. She has been the innocent victim to our admiration —too freely manifested, I am willing to admit, — and for which we owe her our apologies; but no blame can possibly be attributed

to her. Jefferson, set this matter right with Mrs. Jefferson. You know the fault was all on our side."

"I desire that Mr. Jefferson will not attempt to utter a single word in justification of conduct so shockingly improper," observed his wife, her face scarlet with anger; and, again pointing to the door, she motioned to Selina to withdraw.

Indignation had dried the tears on the cheek of the insulted girl, and, disdaining to attempt an exculpation, which she knew would not be received, she left the room with dignity, which prejudiced, still more strongly, the females of the company against her. The men, with the exception of Mr. Blayford, looked stolid and crest-fallen. With returning sobriety came the terror of their wives, and the angry glances of these last were little calculated to reassure them. Mr. Blayford, happy in the independence and impunity afforded him by his state of single blessedness, felt his courage increase in proportion to the diminution of it in his companions; and with an assurance very unsuited to conciliate the prejudices of the ladies, or to ameliorate the position of their victim, he coolly advanced towards them, and demanded why the folly of the men, — and folly he now was prepared to admit they had been guilty of, — should be visited on her who had most reason to complain of it?

"The less said on the subject the better," replied Mrs. Jefferson. "You are not married, Mr. Blayford, and therefore are not so much to blame, although you must allow me to say, that my presence, and that of these ladies, ought to have induced a greater circumspection on your part."

"Really, Ma 'am, the whole affair was, after all, but a joke; a bad one, it may be, but produced by the hilarity incident on a very agreeable dinner; and I should be very sorry, and so I am sure would be my friends," (turning to the crest-fallen husbands present,) "if the charming young lady who has left the room was to suffer for our sins."

"I must be the best judge of what is due to myself and family, and beg that this painful subject may not be renewed," said Mrs. Jefferson, with an air of offended dignity.

"Yes, my dear Blayford, my wife is right, indeed she is always

so: let the disagreeable subject end;" and the cowardly Mr. Jefferson, dreading a curtain lecture, cast a most humble and deprecatory glance at his angry wife.

"I need not advise you to send your governess away as soon as possible," said Mrs. Forsythe. "After what you have seen you must be aware what a dangerous person she is to have in a house where there is a man who has such a taste for beauty as your husband. The best of men have their faults," and Mrs. Forsythe turned up her eyes and sighed. "Ah! my dear friend, you handsome women, when you are chosen by some enamoured man for your good looks, seldom reflect that when youth has passed, and diminished, if not destroyed, the charms that won them," and here the speaker looked at Mr. Jefferson, "they will be apt to look elsewhere for beauty, and be the more attracted by it by the contrast afforded by the faded comeliness of their wives."

Every word of this spiteful speech took the effect intended on the jealous mind of Mrs. Jefferson, and her friend marked with satisfaction that it did so. Extremely plain in looks, Mrs. Forsythe had, during her youth, felt the disadvantage of it; had never touched the heart of mortal, notwithstanding every effort, and the sacrifice of all maidenly reserve and modesty, to accomplish so desired an object. Hence her hatred to beauty became intense. To those in actual possession of it, she felt a positive enmity; and even those who could no longer boast of it, she was disposed to punish for their former claims to the dangerous, but coveted gift. Mrs. Jefferson was one of the few persons who still retained a recollection of the good looks she prided herself on some twenty years ago. So little trace of them remained, that, among recent acquaintances, her having once possessed them would be deemed a very debatable point; and her hen-pecked spouse had so completely forgotten the fact, as sometimes, and particularly when looking at youth and beauty, to wonder why he had married the plain, faded woman who ruled his house and himself with so despotic a sway as to destroy the comfort of both. This oblivion of all her "endearing young charms" he, like many other prudent husbands, carefully confined to his own breast, well aware that *aught which* could ever be implied into a symptom of such ingra-

titude and want of memory, would but render his lot still more insupportable. Seldom did his wife's dear friend, Mrs. Forsythe, visit them, without her punishing Mrs. Jefferson for the recollection of her former personal attractions and frequent groundless vanity; and the graceless husband would have had a spiteful pleasure in the mortification of his better half, were it not that the blows aimed at her rebounded to him. To wound Mrs. Jefferson, it was necessary that hints and inuendos should be given of the fickleness and ingratitude of men in general, but of husbands in particular — hints which never failed to awaken the jealousy of his wife, and to draw down on his head a series of curtain-lectures, enough to quell the courage of a stouter heart than his, followed by days of sullen silence, or outbursts of violent reproach, that rendered his home insupportable. But Mrs. Forsythe was rich — had, as she herself frequently reminded her friends, neither kith nor kin who could advance a claim to become her heir — and, as she despised men too much ever to marry, she should certainly bequeath her fortune to those who studied her wishes and comfort. This speech, often repeated, had secured the wily Mrs. Forsythe an established footing in the houses of four or five of her legacy-hunting acquaintances, each of whom considered her to be one of the most disagreeable women in the world, and avenged themselves for their assidous court to her, by heaping all manner of abuse on her when in the privacy of a conjugal *tête-à-tête*. The Jeffersons were the most persevering in their attentions. Many were the dinners given to conciliate this vulgar and gross-minded favourite of fortune, every dish, and every kind of wine, being selected with a direct reference to her peculiar taste, and a ready assent being always accorded to every assertion she was pleased to make. Nor did this woman "do her spiriting gently;" she exercised an unblushing tyranny over those who, from mercenary motives, submitted to her sway. They were compelled to adopt her opinions, friendships, and enmities; to extend a constant hospitality, (which she never returned,) and to carefully repress every symptom of displeasure at the rude speeches and insulting hints she was in the constant habit of inflicting on them. Nor was she imposed on by their subservience and duplicity.

Perfectly aware of their real sentiments, and of the motive that actuated their hypocrisy, she despised them while availing herself of their hospitality, and often indulged a smile while meditating on the cruel disappointment she meant to inflict on their selfish hopes and expectations.

"Leave my money to such folk," would she say, "who hate, but fear me! No; not a shilling. They think they deceive me into a belief of their attachment: but it is *I* who deceive them. I live on the enemy, enjoy dainties at their expense, which I would grudge to buy; pass my time in amusements provided by their purses; keep up an emulation between them, as to who shall most toady and feast me; and if they outlive me, they shall find how well I understood, and duly appreciated, their interested attentions."

Such was the woman on whom these parasites fawned and counted.

With a beating heart and blushing cheeks, Selina ascended to her wretched bed-room. That she should be insulted because the vulgar and inebriated guests of Mr. Jefferson had chosen to annoy her by their folly, struck her as something so very unreasonable, that she could in no way comprehend it, except by concluding (and the conclusion was not far from the truth) that the female part of the company had also transgressed the bounds of temperance. What had she done? how drawn on herself the annoyance to which she had been subjected? were questions she in vain tried to solve. The hostility of the ladies, so openly revealed by their angry glances and avoidance of her on an occasion when womanly feeling ought to have moved them to sympathize with her alarm and distress, and to show their displeasure alone to the authors of it, was incomprehensible to her. Had Mrs. Forsythe instilled into their minds the prejudices which it was but too apparent from her manner she entertained towards the poor ward of her brother? was the next question that suggested itself to her bewildered mind. — Yes, it must be so; and yet *what had* she done to incur the hatred of this person?

While indulging in these reflections, Kitty made her appearance.

"I 'm come, Miss, if you please," said the girl, with a look of sympathy that did her honour, "to spare you from being affronted. Missis has ordered that you should not be allowed to see the young ladies, and that I 'm to undress and put them to bed. I didn't like to tell you this before them, for Miss Julia is so himperent, that she 'd be sure to say something saucy to you, so I just ran up before 'em, having given them some bits of toast and pudding in the dining-room, to keep them quiet while I ran up. Ah! Miss, I thought you 'd not stay long here; you 're too handsome and genteel. Missis can't abide any one that 's pretty, that 's the truth of it; and only I mind my P's and Q's so well," and here Kitty, the plain and homely maid of all work, assumed the air of a beauty, "I 'd never be able to keep my place; not that it 's much of a place, God knows! but still, missis is so spiteful, that if I went away before I could have a year's character, she might do me a mischief. She 's as jealous as she can be of master: yes, Miss, indeed she is, for all you look so surprised; and if he only looks at me a bit, — and he has a great trick of staring people out of countenance, — she, instead of blaming him, as she ought, blames the person he looks at. Thomas was quite vexed, Miss, when he seed them tipsy gentlemen kneeling down and wanting to kiss your hand, and falling about the floor. He saw well enough it wasn't your fault, but he knew missis would put it on your back. She 's such a rum un! Why, would you believe it, Miss, she was going to turn me away without a character, because master happened one day to stare at me, though I never saw it, and called me all manner of names; and the very week after, she abused me like a pickpocket, because I gave master a box in the ear for attempting to kiss me on the stairs, which she saw from over the banisters. But I told her, and him too, that if ever he tried to kiss me again, or so much as laid a finger on me, I 'd leave the marks of my hand on his face; and so, ever since, he lets me alone."

Here the loquacious Kitty was interrupted by hearing the voices of the young ladies, who, having finished devouring the fragments of pastry she had given them, were ascending in search of her.

"Lock your door, Miss," said the well-meaning girl; "and as Missis said before Thomas, that you should be turned away to-morrow morning, take my advice, and give warning first. If you write her a note, I 'll come back for it."

CHAPTER XXIV.

The proceeding counselled by Kitty offered some temptation to Selina. The greatest of all was, that it would save her from the rudeness and insult which she felt certain that Mrs. Jefferson would assail her with; and daunted by the dread of this, she was more than half disposed to write a note, stating her intention of giving up her situation, and depart without seeing that lady. But then came the thought, whether her taking this step might not be construed into a tacit admission of guilt of some kind, though what that guilt could be, she could not form even the most remote notion. No; she would calmly and steadily wait Mrs. Jefferson's pleasure, confront her with the dignity of conscious virtue and propriety, and if she could not convince that unreasonable woman of her innocence, at least prove to her that she did not shrink from an interview.

Selina pressed a sleepless couch that night; many and painful were the reflections that forced themselves on her mind. She was angry with herself that such persons as those who composed the circle in which she had met with insult and injustice that evening could have the power of wounding and humiliating her; but so it was; and she learned to know the bitter lesson, that the unprotected and dependant can be made to suffer by those whose approval could afford no satisfaction; because they are known to be incompetent to discover merit, or to appreciate it. At an early hour she was summoned to the presence of Mrs. Jefferson.

"She 's in a topping passion, Miss," said Kitty, "and has scolded master all night. I heard her waking him several times, that she might have her scold out; but it wasn't much use, for he was snoring again as loud as ever in two minutes."

"I suppose I need not tell you why I have sent for you thus early, Miss Stratford," said Mrs. Jefferson, when Selina entered

the room. "You must have guessed that after the disgraceful scene of last night, I could not permit you to remain a single day longer in my family."

"The scene to which you refer, Madam, though very painful, was not disgraceful to *me*," replied Selina with dignity. "I cannot be made answerable for the levity and folly of persons, for whose unaccountable conduct, the only excuse that can be urged, was heir inebriety. — Your presence, Madam, ought to have secured me from being made the subject of their coarse pleasantries; but as it did not, I must confess that I anticipated sympathy and protection from you, instead of unmerited reproof and insult. I have consequently come to the determination of remaining no longer under a roof where I cannot count on the protection so needful to a person in my situation, and will, as you desire it, immediately leave your house."

"'Pon my word, you take the business very coolly," replied Mrs. Jefferson, her face becoming crimson with rage. "One would suppose you were a princess in disguise, a persecuted innocent, instead of a —, but I will be cool, yes, I won't demean myself by applying to you the terms you deserve."

"Madam, you must excuse my withdrawing, I cannot subject myself to further insult," and Selina walked towards the door.

"Yes, go, you shameful, forward, impudent —" screamed rather than said, Mrs. Jefferson; but the terrified girl had retreated before that vulgar woman had finished the sentence, and breathless with agitation had reached her miserable chamber, of which she locked the door while she packed up her things, and put on her cloak and bonnet; dreading being pursued by the termagant Mrs. Jefferson. In a few minutes, Kitty, with stealthy steps, ascended the stairs, and whispering through the key-hole "it 's I, Miss," was let in.

"I guessed how it would be, Thomas and I have been listening at the door to all Missis said; she ought to be ashamed of herself, so she ought, to call any one such names. Thomas has run out to call a fly for you, Miss, and he and I will take down your box, and put it into it, though we should lose our places for it."

"Thank you, my good Kitty," said Selina, putting her hand

in her purse, and offering half-a-crown to the girl; but the gift was refused.

"No, Miss, not a penny will I take, nor Thomas neither. You don't know how long you may be out of place, — I beg your pardon, Miss, out of a situation I meant to say, — and you have already been very gen'rous to us. May all good forten attend you, Miss," and Kitty wiped with the back of her hand a tear that was glistening in her eye.

This kindness from the simple, but good-hearted girl, touched Selina, and the spirit that resisted with dignity the insults of Mrs. Jefferson, gave way before the sympathy of her servant.

"I thank you, my good Kitty," said she, and hurried from the room, eager to leave a house where she had suffered such humiliation. But her egress was not to be as silent, or as unnoticed as she had hoped. In the lobby, the two young ladies, her late pupils, were waiting to vent their malice on her.

"Ah! who pulled off Mr. Burford's wig?" demanded Matilda, "and who knocked the gentleman down?" asked Miss Julia. "What fun it was, wasn't it Matty!"

"Yes, famous fun, only mamma says it was so wrong, and that Miss Stratford is so naughty that we must not speak to her."

"I 'm glad you 're going away, for you have done nothing but scold us ever since you came, you cross, ill-natured thing," cried Miss Jefferson, as Selina hurried down stairs, where she found Thomas, who announced that the fly was at the door, and ran to assist Kitty in bringing down the trunk. Selina was soon seated in the carriage, and her traps, as Thomas called them, being placed in it, she directed the driver to Mrs. Vernon's; but when the vehicle entered the next street, a small parcel was thrown into it, which, on examining, she found to be addressed to her. She opened it, and discovered a month's salary, remitted by Mr. Jefferson, with a few civil lines of regret for the annoyance to which she had been subjected the previous night; and for the result which would, he added, be a great loss to his children. The tone of the note was so reserved and respectful, that even the *ealous wife* of the writer might have perused it without finding *aught to justify* suspicion. The truth was, Mr. Jefferson was not

the gallant, gay Lothario his *caro sposo* chose to imagine, and which her invidious friend Mrs. Forsythe, for the sake of vexing her, loved to encourage her to believe. Though he might in a moment of *gaité de coeur*, go so far as to risk a chaste salute to a maid servant, more in the spirit of fun, than with any more culpable intention, he had perception enough to discover, even at the first interview, that the new governess was not a person to permit the slightest approach to familiarity. Selina would have infinitely preferred not receiving any remuneration from the Jefferson family, but she determined to show the note and its enclosure to Mrs. Vernon, and to be guided by her counsel in the affair.

Her reception was as kind as her warmest anticipations could picture. "I am so rejoiced to see you, dear Miss Stratford," said her excellent friend. "I guessed it would be impossible for you to remain long in such a family as the one you entered, and the experience you have now had, must prevent your again accepting any situation which does not hold forth a prospect of comfort. How glad my husband will be to find you here! He has blamed me, and himself too, for not having prevented your going to Mrs. Jefferson's. It was only yesterday that a friend of his told him that he was commissioned to look out for a governess for a very respectable family, in which the teacher would be treated with every kindness. We thought of you directly, and regretted the more your having engaged with that disagreeable person."

Greatly pleased was the worthy Mr. Vernon, when he found Selina at his house. But when the cause was revealed, and the insults she had received were made known, his indignation was so great, that he was more than half disposed to have a lawyer's letter sent to Mrs. Forsythe, threatening her with an action for defamation, being, as he declared his belief to be, the only means of putting a stop to her malice.

"Pray do not take any such step, I trust I may never again come in contact with her," replied Selina, "and I shrink from the publicity, such a measure as the one you propose might entail, with indescribable terror."

After a few days passed tranquilly with her kind friends,

Selina reminded them of the inquiry for a governess made to Mr. Vernon, and repeated to her by his excellent wife.

"I wish you had not named it my dear," said the husband. "Miss Stratford has need of quiet and the society of friends, after the annoyance to which she has been exposed, and gladly would I urge her to remain with us, at least for some time."

Mrs. Vernon pressed the invitation given by her husband to their guest, with all the warmth and affection that prompted it; but Selina persevered in her desire to seek a situation, and they at length yielded to her wishes. The following day Mr. Vernon wrote to his friend, and in a week after, the arrangement was finally made, and Selina went to the family.

Mr. and Mrs. Buxton were rich, but narrow-minded persons. Having from comparative poverty, unexpectedly inherited the fortune of a relation who never gave any intimation of recollecting their existence, until he was near resigning his own, when he bequeathed them his wealth, they found themselves suddenly elevated to a position, to fill which with decent dignity, they were not quite prepared. There was nothing they so ardently desired as to conduct themselves and their newly formed establishment, with a propriety that might conceal how totally unaccustomed they were to the comforts and luxuries they now possessed. The dread of exposing their ignorance to their neighbours, and even to their servants, greatly impaired the sense of enjoyment, which "the goods the gods provided," conferred on them. They were in a state of perpetual constraint before the guests they invited to partake their hospitality, and the domestics who waited at the well covered board. The handsome and well furnished mansion, so unexpectedly come into their possession, they looked on as nothing short of a palace, and so splendid did its appointments appear in their eyes, that they wondered that their visitors were not more impressed by its grandeur, and that their servants seemed in no way surprised by it. Their predecessor, *parvenu*, although he was, had mixed in good society, and had got accustomed to all the external trappings that wealth can furnish. He had kept a French cook, an *artiste* of considerable merit, whose entrées and *entremets*,

had found such favour in the neighbourhood, as to win a popularity for his master that might not otherwise have been conceded him. A *maître d'hôtel*, groom of the chambers, under butler, and two tall footmen, had formed the male portion of the establishment of the late owner of Heathfield Park; and when Mr. Buxton succeeded to its possession, he and his wife, after serious consideration and mature deliberation came to the conclusion, that as the servants they found in the house must know the ways of it much better than any new ones could be expected to do, or, in truth, than they the owners did, it would be well to engage their continuance in the establishment.

This note of preparation sounded well in the neighbourhood. It was clear, so argued the occupants of the castles, abbeys, and parks, that dotted the vicinity, that the *parvenu* come amongst them was determined to keep up the style of living of his deceased relation, and as hospitality, like charity, covers a multitude of sins, it was agreed that the Buxtons should be well received. The servants were the first to discover the total ignorance of refined life and its usages, in their new employers. The *maître d'hôtel* perceived at a glance, that they were awe-struck by the splendour of their new possessions, and his respect for them was by no means increased by this discovery. The *chef de cuisine*, when he presented his *menu*, saw that they could not even read it, and was compelled to explain in very unintelligible broken English the signification of the various items entered on it; and and the confusion and dismay pictured on their countenances as he endeavoured to describe the component parts of the different dishes. The under butler and footman glanced at each other in horror, when they found that their master and mistress did not know how to name any of the *plats* offered to them, and saw them use a knife and fork to serve dishes invariably dissected with a spoon. Conscious that the inquisitorial eyes of their menials were fixed on them, and fearful that their inexperience in French cookery, and the elegant "appliances to boot" of a fashionably served table would be exposed, they sat the head and foot of the well covered board in a state of discomfort not to be described. The sounds of their own voices, as they reverberated in the

marble-lined and lofty *salle a manger*, rendered them nervous; and yet they felt that to disguise their ignorance and constraint, they must assume an appearance of courage and ease, which they were far from possessing. The repast was any thing but an agreeable one to them. Unused to French *plats*, even this novelty failed to gratify their unsophisticated palates; and they would have infinitely preferred a slice of roast beef and vegetables, or some such plain and simple fare, to the elaborate *entrées* set before them, the merits of which they were not prepared to appreciate. It is a fact known to many, that savages when they first hear fine music experience no pleasure from the dulcet sounds, preferring their own discordant ones, to which long habit has inured them. So it is with homely palates; that food to which they have been accustomed, they find preferable to the most exquisite viands previously untasted. Glad were this pair, when the dessert placed on the table, and the servants withdrawn, they found themselves released from the intolerable constraint under which they had been suffering.

Mrs. Buxton drew a deep inspiration, and looking up at the richly decorated ceiling, exclaimed — "Well, my dear Mr. B., how glad I am it is over. I wonder shall I ever get used to it. But is it not a miserable thing tobe in one's own house and not to be able to feel that all the fine things about one, really do belong to us?"

"Never mind, my dear. It *does* seem strange just at first; but I dare say we shall get perfectly used to it in time. One does to everything, I have remarked; and a day will come when we shall think no more of this grand house, than if we had been living in it all our lives. You see the servants don't seem to think anything of it."

"Yes, my dear Mr. B., I noticed that, and, only I was shy, I would have told some of them to be more careful of this beautiful Turkey carpet, which I saw them let drops of water fall on, from that huge silver thing, that looks like a fountain, near the sideboard."

"I feel quite uncomfortable at having eaten so many different *kickshaws*. Well, they may say what they will, but give me a

joint of well boiled, or roasted meat, in preference to all the French stews and ragouts in the world, which clog, without satisfying the stomach."

"Just what I think, too, my dear Mr. B. I couldn't help remarking all the time these powdered fellows were staring us in the face, watching every morsel we put into our mouths, and, as I really fancied two or three times, laughing at us, how much more comfortable we used to be at dinner at Dairy Cottage, in our snug little parlour, with tidy little Nancy to wait on us, and our one good dish of meat with vegetables, and our glass of mild ale, than in this vast room, with its cold shining walls, its painted ceiling, and gilt cornices, the blaze of light over the table, and the load of plate on it."

"I confess, my dear Sarah, that the same thought occurred to me. It 's a pity the old gentleman never thought of telling us that we were to be his heirs, never asked us to come here and see him for a bit, so that we could have been prepared for all this grandeur, and need not be shy before these powdered jackanapes. But it 's no use thinking of that now; we ought to be thankful that, if he forgot us for so many years, he remembered us at last, and try to enjoy the good things he has left us."

"Very true, my dear Mr. B., — very true. You always say the right thing, and in the right place. I 've been thinking that if we got a governess, we could learn many things from her, which would be much less disagreeable than learning from servants, or having them staring at our ignorance of many things, which it 's no fault of ours that we don't know, seeing that we never saw them before."

"But our children are so young, Sarah. They won't be fit for a governess for two or three years to come."

"Granted; but if we now engage one, *we* may profit by it, and, by an intimate association with a well-educated lady-like woman, become more fit for the station we are now to fill. We can always say we wished to have a first-rate governess for our daughters, even to begin with, instead of the nursery ones, half nurse-maid and half teacher, which some persons employ."

"It 's a very good notion, Sarah; and I will ask two or three of my friends to look out for such a person."

Such was the family into which Selina was about to enter, and the engagement being concluded, a request was made that she should lose as little time as possible in proceeding to Heathfield Park.

CHAPTER XXV.

The kindness of Miss Stratford's reception at Heathfield Park, made her feel at home there before she had been an hour beneath its roof. Mrs. Buxton, a good-looking, over-dressed, kind-mannered little woman, was seated in a library of large dimensions, and classical decoration, when Miss Stratford was announced. She stood up, advanced to meet her with extended hands, which cordially clasped those of Selina, welcomed her with unaffected pleasure, and, before the servant could place a chair for her, drew one herself close to that to which she had risen from, and even pushed a *tabouret* in front of it, for her feet. The servant stared at his mistress's unceremonious proceedings; and Selina, though grateful, experienced some surprise at such unprecedented condescension.

"You must have some luncheon, indeed you must," said the mistress of the mansion, on hospitable thoughts intent.

This proposition being declined.

"O! I see you are afraid of giving trouble," resumed Mrs. Buxton; "but pray don't for we have so many servants — indeed, so many more than we can find work for — that you need not mind employing them. We dine late, too; and, to tell you the truth, our dinners are so Frenchified, that I am afraid you won't like 'em. Well, then, a sandwich; or at least, a bit of cake and a glass of wine?"

No excuse would be taken, and a bit of cake and a little wine and water were at length accepted.

"I am so glad you are come, and so pleased that you are not old or plain," continued Mrs. Buxton, looking with undissembled complacency at Selina. "I do so like handsome people."

Selina blushed at the implied compliment.

"My children are very young, Miss Stratford: too young to be yet able to derive all the benefit I trust they may hereafter receive from your instructions; but, in the mean while, you will begin with them, for I 'm sure," and the speaker sighed deeply, "it is never too soon to commence giving them good manners and habits."

Mr. Buxton soon after entered, and gave a kind reception to the governess; and there was something so peculiarly good-natured in the unceremonious cordiality of this unsophisticated couple, that, although conscious of their want of refinement and high breeding, Selina thought that the absence of both was fully compensated for by it. The children, too, were pretty, rosy-cheeked, sweet-tempered little girls, who ran with outstretched arms to embrace their mamma, the moment she entered the nursery to present them to Selina. A tall, fat, stern-looking woman, who enacted the *rôle* of upper nurse, arose with an ill grace to receive Mrs. Buxton and called out — "Miss Buxton, Miss Mary, you must not run wild in that manner. It 's very rude. Walk up slowly to your mamma, drop her a nice curtsey, and behave like young ladies."

But little was the caution or reproof heeded. The little girls rushed to their doting mother's embrace, clung to her, and almost smothered her with kisses.

"Miss Buxton, Miss Mary! you must not behave so vulgarly," said the stern woman, advancing to remove them from Mrs. Buxton.

"No, Mrs. Price, pray let them kiss me as much as they like," said the kind mother, her eyes beaming with tenderness, as they glanced from her first-born to little dimpled Mary.

"Well Ma'am, *I* must not be blamed if they are as wild as colts," observed Mrs. Price, her colour, always a high one, becoming nearly crimson. "I assure you, Ma'am, at her grace's the Duchess of Sheerness's, I was never interfered with in the nursery; and her grace would no more have permitted the ladies Adelaide, Victoria, or Albertine to rush up and embrace her, as

Miss Buxton and Miss Mary have just done you, than she would have allowed the Duke's great dog Hector, to jump on her, and lick her grace's face."

Poor Mrs. Buxton looked so guilty and embarrassed, that Selina no longer wondered that the termagant Mrs. Price had taken advantage of her gentleness and good nature, to dictate to her mistress instead of receiving her instructions.

"Perhaps," said the fond mother, with a beseeching look, "the Duchess of Sheerness was not so partial to children as I am?"

"Oh! her grace had just the *proper* affection for them, Ma'am. Her grace used to say to me — 'Now mind, my good Price,' (her grace loved to call me her 'good Price,') 'don't let them be boisterous or rude. Never let them run, I can't bear to see young ladies run. Make them always hold up their heads, walk slowly, and turn out their toes; and whenever I stoop to kiss their foreheads, don't let them attempt to put their arms around my neck, to derange my *collerette* and hair.' And, indeed, before I was with them three months, they 'd have no more dreamt of rushing up to their mamma, and deranging her dress, than of pulling *me* about; but, I must say, her grace, who was a great lady in every respect — the daughter of a duke, the sister of a duke, and the wife of a duke — knew perfectly how young ladies should be brought up."

Selina wondered at the forbearance of Mrs. Buxton, and took a strong dislike to the woman who could thus abuse it. The children evinced a similar feeling towards Mrs. Price, added to a dread, which, when not in the presence of their mother, kept them in a state of constraint, little calculated to add to their health or comfort.

"This young lady," said Mrs. Buxton, to her little girls, "is so good as to promise me to teach you many things, if you will be good and obedient."

Mrs. Price looked daggers at Selina, and was still more incensed, when the docile little girls, won by her mild countenance (*an attraction* of which children are peculiarly sensitive,) walked *over to her*, held up their rosy mouths to be kissed, the ele-

exhibiting it, and with a rueful face and many a sigh, commenced wiping it.

"Here are the ribbons for your lordship to take your choice," said a footman presenting a silver waiter, on which were spread out divers sashes of every hue, appertaining to the Misses Buxton. The man had heard the offer made by his mistress to the peer, and in his officiousness to obey her wishes, had not waited to hear the stern, and somewhat contemptuous refusal made to it.

"Take them away, take them away," said the earl, growing even more red in the face than before, and waving his hand with an air of offended dignity.

"If your lordship's linen is at all wet, I will instantly get you a shirt of mine," said the obtuse Mr. Buxton, forgetting or unconscious of the offended dignity with which the offer of a coat had been declined.

"A *chemise* of your's, Sir," repeated Lord Renfrewshire, "good God!" and he absolutely shuddered at the bare notion.

Carefully did he wipe off the soup from his ribbon; but alas! the stain left behind was indelible, and with a pious care did he pass his perfumed handkerchief over the star of his order, almost groaning while he did so. Having removed the soup from his coat with his own hand, touching the napkins employed for the purpose as if his contact with them were disgusting and degrading to him, he held his coat before the fire, maintaining as erect a posture, and as stern a silence as he could during the operation, broken only by half suppressed groans of horror.

"Now, Sir," said he, "I believe I may put on my coat, and accompany you to the *salle à manger*."

Mr. Buxton attempted to assist him to resume it, but he was waved off, with nearly as much dignity, as the offered services of the servant were declined, and having with some difficulty succeeded in donning it himself, the peer motioned to his host to follow, and walked back to the dining-room. The frequency of the display of his order, had often drawn on Lord Renfrewshire, the ridicule of his acquaintances, and more especially of those amongst them who possessed not this distinction. His neighbours asserted that he could not partake a family dinner with them, or at his

own house, without sporting this badge of the favour of his Sovereign, or of the complaisance of the Prime Minister. Nay, there were some of them who declared, his lordship wore it when he slept; but this was rather to be doubted, for Lady Renfrewshire possessed too much "decent dignity" to reveal the secrets of the conjugal chamber, and his lordship would have deemed it an outrage to have suffered any one else to even guess them.

"Now that we are all right again," said the host, taking his seat without ever thinking of apologizing to the noble ladies at each side of him, for his absence, "I must say that when I saw his lordship's red ribbon nearly covered with the white soup, I was directly reminded of a lobster with a may or nays sauce (Mr. Buxton's mode of pronouncing *mayonnaise*), as my French cook often serves it."

A suppressed laugh broke from several of the guests at this extraordinary liberty, taken with one of the proudest men in England, and on so short an acquaintance, while all looked to see how the pompous peer would take it. The Earl drew himself up with a haughty air, and darting a glance of contempt at his host, replied, "I know not which to admire most, Sir, your happiness in finding resemblances, or your tact and good taste in revealing them."

Lady Renfrewshire looked daggers at Mrs. Buxton, while expressing her hope that Lord Renfrewshire's health would not suffer from the accident.

"I would not allow any thing to be removed, my lord," said Mrs. Buxton meekly, perceiving that the Earl was offended, although she did not guess precisely at what, and anxious to atone for his annoyance.

"You are too good, Madam," observed he, bowing stiffly.

"Won't your lordship have some soup?"

"I could not, Madam, on any account allow the ladies present to be put to the inconvenience of waiting for the next course, while I had soup;" and he glanced at his host, who was swallowing his with all the gusto of a gourmand.

"*You* will at least take some fish, my lord? The turbot is *good*, and the other fish, I forget the name of it, is excellent."

"Excuse me, Madam, I have a great dislike to cold fish, except *en mayonnaise.*"

"I 'm really quite distressed that your lordship has had neither soup nor fish."

"I beg, Madam, that you will not give it a moment's thought."

Lord Forestville noticing the haughty air and manner with which his brother peer received the well-meant, though not well-bred, attentions of Mrs. Buxton, attempted to lessen her visible embarrassment by entering into conversation with her. He talked of the fine scenery in the neighbourhood, enumerated the picturesque drives, spoke of gardening and flowers, praised her fine conservatory, and admirable hot-houses, but could get nothing more than a monosyllabic assent to his remarks. Her eyes wandered around the table "on hospitable thoughts intent," and with a zeal that did credit to her anxiety that her guests should fare well; although it exposed her to their animadversions on her ignorance of *les usages du monde*, she raised her naturally low voice to its loudest pitch to offer them the dainties spread before them.

"Do, my lady, just taste the lamb cutlets with green peas, or perhaps your ladyship would prefer *free candour (fricandeau)* with sorrel. Lady Forestville, won't you have some *vole vond (vol-au-vent)*. Lady Marchmount," (leaving out the Emily, — a vulgarism that greatly disgusted that fine lady, who never wished those she associated with to forget she was an earl's daughter, although, in consideration of his twenty thousand a-year, she had condescended to marry a baronet). "Lady Rosina, I beg you will eat some venison; and you, Lady Alicia, won 't you try it? Mrs. Grimthorpe, let me send you some *pully à la rain*, *(poulet à la Reine)*. Do, pray, ask Miss Grimthorpe and Miss Stratford if they would like some?"

The generally pale face of the kind-hearted Mrs. Buxton became flushed almost to crimson, from the arduous duties in which she was engaged, and her elaborate discharge of them, so unlike the quiet *nonchalance* of ladies of fashion, when presiding at their tables, only served to draw on her the ridicule of her guests, and the contempt of her servants, whose savoir faire

would have enabled them to fulfil their service so much better, had they been left to follow their usual routine, instead of being ordered about by one so inexperienced as their mistress.

"Good heavens! see how the poor hostess flushes and pants," said the supercilious Mr. Morton Cavendish, to his next neighbour. "The hostess of a country inn, presiding at a wedding or christening *fête*, never displayed more indefatigable zeal."

"*Que voulez-vous*," was the reply; "what can be expected from *parvenues*, and above all, from such vulgar ones as the Buxtons."

"Did you hear her offer Renfrewshire the *rain soup*? Was not that capital? But I forgive her all her sins against *les bienséances*, in consideration of her having caused the destruction, or desecration, as he termed it, of his ribbon of the Bath. I trust we shall be spared seeing its *remplacement*, for at least some time."

"You really are somewhat ill-natured," observed Lady Emily Marchmount.

"*You* can have no reason to dread ill-nature; for in you all is *irreproachable*, save and except a certain induration of the heart, which all, who can appreciate beauty and talent, must deplore."

"You are becoming quite sentimental, I declare, but have ill-chosen your time; for the long delay occasioned by Lord Renfrewshire's mischance, has greatly increased my appetite; and the *entrées* of Monsieur Mitonné, though grown rather tepid, are not to be despised in administering to its cravings. Philosophers assert that only one of our senses can be gratified at the same moment; so that while Mitonné, and he really is an excellent *artiste*, satisfies my hunger, even the delicate flattery, of so able a professor of that art as you, affords not its usual delight to my ear."

"I wish women would eat more at luncheon," observed Mr. Morton Cavendish, "provided always that I am not present at the operation; for I have as great a horror of seeing them feed as Byron had. But a copious luncheon would leave them at liberty *to con*verse during dinner; and conversation is a great assistant *to dige*stion."

"Then you were looking at conversation more from the physical advantage, than the moral *agrément* to be derived from it," remarked Lady Emily Marchmount, sarcastically.

"Accurate observer, acute reasoner, profound philosopher!" said the gentleman, with an insidious smile. "One half forgets the rare beauty of the shining casket, when the bright treasures of mind it holds are suffered to flash on us."

"You grow quite poetical, Mr. Morton Cavendish; but I think you have partly stolen your graceful simile of 'shining casket,' from Moore."

"Don 't imagine anything so dreadful, dear Lady Emily. In pity don't. Why, if I don't mistake, that poet flourished, as they call it, some forty years ago; and I never read anything obsolete. How you, *so young*," and he laid a peculiar emphasis on the two monosyllables, "could ever have heard of him, I can't guess, for he must have been long out of fashion before your noble parents had left their respective nurseries."

The cheeks of Lady Emily grew of a brighter red than the slight *soupçon* of rouge, so artistically laid on, could account for. She felt the malice of the speech; for, conscious that she wished to pass for being at least ten years younger than she really was, a deception supported by sending a false statement to every new edition of a certain perfidious book, entitled, "The Peerage," she had some doubts that the real state of the case was more than surmised, and eschewed, as much as possible, every reference to the subject.

While this conversation was passing between Lady Emily and Mr. Morton Cavendish, the ladies Rosina and Alicia Murray, extremely displeased at having no beaux invited to meet them, vented their anger by sundry contemptuous glances at Selina, who sate at the opposite side of the table. "I should like to know who that person, sitting next Mrs. Grimthorpe, is?" said Lady Rosina, addressing herself to the General.

"I don't wonder at your curiosity, for the young lady is extremely handsome," was the reply.

"I don't agree with you, for I think her a very common-place sort of girl; and I dare say she is some damsel from one of the

manufacturing towns, the daughter, probably, of a cotton-printer or cutler, and most likely a relation of our *distinguée* hostess."

"Well, although Mrs. Buxton may be, and is, I dare say, a very worthy woman, I should never dream of calling her *distinguée*," replied the good old General, who, with many excellent and estimable qualities, possessed little powers of discrimination, and was so matter-of-fact, that he took *au pied de la lettre* all that was said to him.

"How very odd," said Lady Rosina. "But then you are so very fastidious, General, and no wonder, accustomed as you are to perfection in your own family:" and, unseen by the General, she smiled maliciously.

"You are very good to think so, Lady Rosina, I am sure," observed the pleased old man. "It is true, Mrs. Grimthorpe and my daughter are all that I could desire; still I am not so foolish as to suppose that they are, as you assert, perfection."

"Don't you think it was very original of our host and hostess to invite so many more women than men to dinner? never calculating how those ladies, who had no gentlemen to hand them out to dinner, were to get to the *salle à manger*."

"It was an oversight, I must admit; but my good wife remedied it famously. There is no one like her for getting out of a difficulty."

"I suppose our host and hostess calculated on this peculiar characteristic of Mrs. Grimthorpe," said Lady Rosina, sneeringly, "when they invited six gentlemen and nine ladies, and out of the six only one unmarried man, Mr. Morton Cavendish, who is so insupportable, that he is likely to be a bachelor all his life."

"Do let me recommend you a little *fricandeau*," said Mrs. Grimthorpe to Miss Stratford. "You really eat nothing; and as I have taken charge of you I must not let you starve."

During the whole dinner the good-natured woman attended most kindly to the young person she had taken under her charge, whose mild countenance and gentleness had interested her.

"How long have you been in this part of the world?" inquired *Mrs. Grimthorpe*, whose besetting sin was curiosity.

"*I* arrived only to-day, Madam."

"Indeed! You are come, I hope, to make some stay?"

"I trust so!"

"You are a near relation of Mr. or Mrs. Buxton, I suppose?"

"No, Madam, I have not that honour."

"The daughter of an old friend, I conclude."

"No, Madam; my parents were not known to Mr. or Mrs. Buxton."

"How very odd, that being neither related, nor your family known to the Buxtons, that you should find yourself domiciled with them. How is this?"

"I am come as governess."

"As governess!" reiterated Mrs. Grimthorpe; not *sotto voce*, but in a tone so loud as to be heard by many of the persons around her, including the Ladies Rosina and Alicia Murray.

"Well, I hope you will be comfortable," resumed Mrs. Grimthorpe good-naturedly; and to her credit be it said, that her attentions to Selina rather increased than relaxed from the discovery of her position in Mrs. Buxton's family.

"Only fancy these vulgar persons having their governess at table with *us*," said Lady Rosina. "It is quite enough that we should tolerate them, without associating with their dependents."

"The young lady appears to be a very nice lady-like person, and very pretty into the bargain," replied General Grimthorpe. "I have seen persons with less beauty, and distinction of manner and air, make great marriages; and I shouldn't wonder if in this case, a similar good fortune might occur. We old soldiers though often accused of being martinets, are never surprised at promotion from the ranks, when merit justifies it, and promotion to a higher station, won by beauty and goodness, we view in the same light."

"You are very indulgent, General, nevertheless I am of opinion that the person opposite, — I forget her name, — has very little chance of the good fortune you half prophesy for her. Men, that is to say young men, are not such fools now-a-days; and pretty governesses, like pretty ladies' maids are seldom, if ever, raised from the ranks as you call it."

A general move, indicating that the ladies were leaving the room, prevented further comments from the spiteful Lady Rosina.

but no sooner had she entered the drawing-room than she retired to an ottoman with her sister the Lady Alicia, where their congenial minds gave free vent to their indignation at Mrs. Buxton's having intruded into their society a person whose subordinate position rendered her so unfit for such an honour. Miss Grimthorpe took a seat by Selina, and soon engrossed her in a lively and agreeable conversation, in which, if much of the old soldier frankness of the father, with the good-natured curiosity of the mother, peeped forth, the amalgamation contained so much good-sense and unaffected kindness, as to interest Selina greatly in favour of her new acquaintance.

CHAPTER XXVII.

Poor Mrs. Buxton was as little at her ease, in her splendid drawing-room, as at the head of her dinner-table. Her anxiety to discharge the duties of an attentive hostess, combined with her ignorance of, in what these duties consisted, rendered her fidgetty and fussy, and prevented her lady guests from enjoying that *laisser aller* and freedom from ceremonious constraint, which formed the peculiar attraction of that house in the bachelor days of the former owner.

"What fine Sèvres china you possess," said Lady Forestville, glancing at some vases of that celebrated manufactory, of great value.

"Are they very good?" inquired Mrs. Buxton. "I am no judge of china, except Staffordale, which I think very beautiful."

The ladies looked at each other in astonishment at this *naïve* confession; and Lady Renfrewshire, provoked into malice by the affront she conceived herself to have received, from Mr. Buxton's leading out Lady Forestville to dinner, determined to avenge on the wife the offence given by the husband, thus addressed her, "Of course you admire buhl?"

"Bulls," repeated Mrs. Buxton. "No, I can't say I do. I am rather afraid of them, since one of the poor women in the *neighbourhood* was tossed by one a short time ago; but I like *cows.*"

This blunder produced a laugh from all, except Mrs. Grimthorpe, her daughter, and Selina, who, displeased at the ridicule heaped on their hostess, marked their disapproval by their gravity. "Ah! I see, ladies, you are amused by my cowardice," said Mrs. Buxton, wholly unconscious of the real cause of the risibility in which her guests indulged; "but you must remember I never lived in the country until I came here."

"Perhaps you prefer marqueterie," resumed Lady Renfrewshire, desirous to expose still further the ignorance of her hostess.

"Marketting, did your ladyship say?" inquired Mrs. Buxton. "I used to like marketting very much. I think it is very pleasant to choose butter, eggs, poultry, fish, and meat, oneself, instead of being imposed on, as one always is, by servants."

A stifled laugh followed this mistake.

"I see you have some fine specimens of *Pietra Duro*," observed Lady Renfrewshire.

"Peter Douro, I never heard of him before," replied Mrs. Buxton, "who is he?"

This innocent question set the ladies into a general titter, in which they were freely indulging when the gentlemen entered the drawing room, and checked their hilarity. "Did you ever meet such ignorance?" whispered Lady Forestville. "Never except in the husband," replied Lady Renfrewshire, "he really is too bad."

"I was quite horrified at his persistance in taking me out to dinner instead of you," observed Lady Forestville, "and did all I could to set him right, but he is impracticable."

"What dreadful people to have for neighbours! we must manage to see as little of them as possible."

"Yes, but not offend them, for his interest in the county will be useful."

Never passed evening more heavily, and difficult would it be to decide whether the givers or receivers of the party suffered the most *ennui*. Glad were both, when the carriages were announced, to be released from the infliction they had been mutually enduring, and they separated, both parties longing to express without restraint the distaste they had imbibed towards each other.

The unaffected kindness and simplicity of Mrs. Buxton soon

completely won the good will of Selina. She saw that a desire of rendering herself more *au fait* of the usages of society, and of acquiring a little more ease of manner, had induced this good-natured but ignorant woman to seek a governess for herself rather than for her children, who were yet too young to profit by the instructions of one; and she only regretted that her own inexperience rendered her less capable of being serviceable to her. Nevertheless, little as Selina had seen of society, her education, reading, and above all, the time passed with the elegant and highly polished Lady Almondbury, had taught her to maintain a lady-like demeanour and manner, of which Mrs. Buxton stood greatly in need, and which she in return for kindness would gladly if possible teach her to acquire. The task she felt would not be an easy one, for to an unconquerable dislike to reading, were added other impediments, Mrs. Buxton being wholly deficient in talent, narrow-minded, prone to court the great, and to defer to their opinion on every subject, while professing to be careless of it. She loved her husband and her children fondly, because, as she with great *naiveté* was wont to acknowledge, they were hers; but here closed the circle of her affections, there was no room for any new one. But though Selina soon perceived that she could not hope to render Mrs. Buxton other than a very common-place person, she took such pains to convey instruction to her, and to simplify it as much as possible, that gradually, though by slow degrees, the deportment and manners of that lady became less objectionable. When confidence had replaced the constraint of the first few weeks, Mrs. Buxton referred to the scene of the dinner on the first day's arrival of Selina. "Now do tell me, my dear Miss Stratford, whether I was not right in thinking that Lady Renfrewshire, her daughters, and indeed all the other great ladies, with the exception of Mrs. and Miss Grimthorpe, were turning me into ridicule that day? I felt they were, yet I did not know what blunders I was committing, though some I guessed I must have been guilty of, from the manner in which they laughed whenever I spoke. You may remember how they screamed with *laughter* when I spoke of bulls, and marketting, and Peter *Douro!* which I only did because they introduced the subjects."

Selina walked with her through the richly decorated rooms, pointed out the buhl cabinets, and explained to her that the name was given owing to the first manufacturer being named Buhl. "Oh! my dear Miss Stratford how stupid and ignorant I must have appeared in their eyes," and Mrs. Buxton's cheeks grew red as she made the reflection; "and yet," resumed she, "how much kinder it would have been of them to have told me what you have now explained. And about the marketting, what made them laugh so much?" When told that marqueterie was furniture composed of inlaid woods of various colours, specimens of which were pointed out to her, she blushed at her former mistake; "But tell me who was Peter Douro?" inquired she, "for when I named him you must have remarked how they laughed. I do assure you, my dear Miss Stratford, that I felt so much ashamed and embarrassed that I knew not which way to look. Oh! the pain of seeing that in one's own house, one is made a laughing stock of, without being able to guess why, is dreadful, and makes one wish that one was back again in one's humble home, among kind friends who would neither mock nor laugh at one."

When a fine table, inlaid with *Pietra Duro* was pointed out to its simple owner, and that she understood what the two words signified she remarked on the unkindness of blaming her ignorance of a language she had never been taught, and of articles of furniture, never seen by her, until her entrance in the mansion now her own.

"Oh! do pray, dear Miss Stratford, teach me the names of all these things. You will find me a docile, if not a quick scholar," said the simple hearted and unpretending Mrs. Buxton, "for though I am not a vain or proud woman, God forbid I should be, I have some feeling, and dread becoming an object of ridicule to those with whom I am to associate. What a different notion I had of grandees; I thought they were condescending, and indulgent, more especially to those who were unpretending and simple like myself. But I suppose all are not like those in this neighbourhood. Did you notice how cross and offended Lord Renfrewshire looked when I offered him one of my little girl's sashes to replace his red ribband? I meant the offer kindly, and

if he has such a foolish fancy as to wear a ribband over his waistcoat, which I never saw any one do before, surely one ribband would be as good as another."

Glad was Selina to be enabled, through her residence with her kind departed patroness, Lady Almondbury, to give Mrs. Buxton much information acquired beneath the roof of that admirable woman. In her princely mansion, filled with objects of *vertu* of the most costly description; its walls covered with family portraits bearing the orders of the Garter, the Bath, and the Golden Fleece, she had heard Lady Almondbury explain to her daughter the names of each specimen of art, and the different badges of distinction, displayed on the costumes of her ancestors; and Selina had eagerly profitted by the instruction designed for her pupil.

"You know every thing, dear Miss Stratford," observed Mrs. Buxton, "and how fortunate may I consider myself in having found so kind a monitress. One who will instruct without laughing at my ignorance."

The information derived from Selina was in secret conveyed by Mrs. Buxton to her husband, and often was the governess amused by hearing him say, "What was the name you told me, my dear, of this?" laying his hand on a splendid cabinet of *pietra duro*.

"Tell him, dear Miss Stratford," would Mrs. Buxton say; "for you pronounce the words so nicely."

"I can remember the names of the other things by thinking of a bull, or of marketing," observed Mr. Buxton, laughing; "but the different kinds of fine cheny puzzles me."

"Sèvres, my dear, *old* Sèvres, that is the finest of all China; is not it, Miss Stratford? Then comes *old* Dresden."

"But why must it be old to be fine?"

"Yes, dear Miss Stratford, I forgot to inquire, as my husband has done, why must it be old?"

"Because the modern is far inferior in quality to the old, which, being generally sought after, has become much more rare, and expensive."

"Well, as long as I'm not called on to admire old women, I

don't care about admitting the superiority of old china; though I must say, that as, in modern times, we have improved in the manufacture of other articles, I don't see why we should not have progressed in that of china."

"Perhaps that 's the same as in pictures, my dear," observed Mrs. Buxton. "You heard Lady Forestville say that her gallery was considered to contain the finest collection of pictures in the county, and all by the ancient masters."

"And more shame for her, too," replied Mr. Buxton. "How are the artists of our own time to live, if people will only buy the works of old masters, I should like to know? Pretty encouragement for rising talent! It 's my opinion, that, if all the old pictures in this county were burnt, it would be the happiest thing for painting, as well as for painters, that could happen. You would see what our own artists would then do, not that I think they do amiss now. Let me see any picture of the ancients that can show such birds, or animals, as Landseer's, — ay, or such honest country faces. He puts such a life and a meaning into them, that even I who, God knows, am no judge, can't help seeing that, on his canvass, there 's truth and nature caught in the fact, as I may say. Then look at Frank Grant's portraits! Why, hang me, if he does not give the very men and women, just as God made them. Look at Maclise's pictures—what richness of fancy, what excellence in drawing; and there 's many other great painters of our own time that I could mention. And then tell me that people, with plenty of money, will only have old pictures in their galleries. Why, when I see these old brown shining things, that cover the walls of all the rooms in this house, and which, I am told cost my predecessor such mints of money, I heartily wish they were away, and that in their places I had the productions of the best of our own artists. And so I soon would have; but that my cousin has made the pictures here heir-looms. I declare it 's quite a trouble, instead of a pleasure, to gaze on them. Look at one side, and they remind you of one of those hideous Daguerotypes, which you must twist and turn, in heaven only knows how many lights, *before you* can seize the likeness. You see a mass *of brown and dark* yellow on the canvass, without being able to

distinguish objects. You move away to another point, still you don't get to the right view; and, after having shifted your position from one spot to another, at last you see the picture, just as you do an old woman, all the worse for wear."

There was a raciness and originality in the mind and manners of Mr. Buxton, that often amused Selina, although they rendered him unsuited to the habits and notions of his aristocratic neighbours. He was not like his more docile wife, disposed to adopt their refined ideas, or cold and reserved behaviour. He laughed in derision at their fastidiousness; and, as he became more accustomed to their society, felt less respect for their opinions. With Mrs. Buxton it was otherwise. When she accepted invitations to their feudal mansions, she was deeply impressed with the air of massive grandeur, that reigned around. The hangings, the pictures, the statues, the plate, the furniture, all seemed nearly coeval with the houses; yet in such a state of perfect preservation, that time had only served to give a finer tone to the whole, without at all impairing the beauty. These splendid possessions, which had for centuries passed from father to son, vouching for a long line of noble ancestry, had a very imposing effect on Mrs. Buxton, and prevented her from feeling that ease in the society of "those grandees," as her husband denominated them, without which social intercourse must always be irksome. She marked with surprise the perfect *savoir faire* with which the ladies of these stately mansions presided at their tables, leaving the offering of the various *plats* to the well-drilled servants, who glided around the table as noiseless as ghosts; the hostesses not to be distinguished from their female guests, by any fussy attentions to the wants or wishes of these last. She now discovered that giving great dinners might impose much less trouble on a mistress of a house, with a large establishment than she had previously been wont to imagine, and reflected with *mauvaise honte*, how strange these titled dames must have thought her unceasing attention to them when they had dined with her. Something of this she confided to the ear of the husband.

"Stuff! nonsense, my dear," said he. "They may be as fine as they like, and think it all right not to take any more notice

of their guests than if the whole party were dining at an ordinary, where every one is for himself, and takes no heed of his neighbour. But I prefer the warm cordiality of those we used to live with, before we came to our present fortune, and I should be sorry to see you lose it."

Mrs. Buxton was surprised that Selina's name was never included in any of the invitations sent to her, and at first felt more than half-disposed to resent what she deemed an incivility, and to decline accepting them. Selina overruled this intention, and explained the general position of a governess in a family.

"What a shame," observed Mrs. Buxton, "to exclude a young lady from society, because she is performing duties, to be enabled to discharge which, she must have received an education that would fit her for the very best."

Mrs. Grimthorpe, alone, included Selina in the card of invitation to Mr. and Mrs. Buxton; but Selina, dreading to be exposed to the supercilious treatment, experienced from the Ladies Rosina and Alicia Murray, declined the invitation, although warmly pressed to accept it by Mrs. Buxton. How tranquilly and happily passed those evenings, when Mr. and Mrs. Buxton, absent from home, left the governess at liberty to pass the too fleeting hours, employed in reading in the well-stored library. Solitude, instead of being irksome, possessed an irresistable charm for her, and glad, and thankful would she have been to enjoy it more frequently. With every creature comfort, — nay, surrounded by luxuries, which she was cordially welcomed to partake, the total dearth of all intellectual intercourse, and the engrossment of her whole time by Mrs. Buxton, to the utter impossibility of devoting even a few hours to the perusal of the choice books now within her reach, were heavily felt by Selina. In vain she sought by early rising to snatch an hour for her studies; Mrs. Buxton was as *matinale* as herself, and was no sooner dressed, than she summoned Selina to her presence. Miss Stratford must walk with her, visit the conservatory, the pet-dairy, the poultry-yard, and the flower-garden with her; must preside at the breakfast-table, read, and explain the *menu* interpret between the French *maître d'hôtel* and his employers; must accompany Mrs. Buxton

to the nursery, to pay her diurnal visit to the children; must sit and chat with that lady while she worked (Mrs. Buxton was a great worker), for she liked to talk, and be talked to, while her fingers pursued their rotary routine; but she graciously permitted Selina to draw, or embroider, if she wished it, only making a condition that the flow (not of soul), but of words, should not be interrupted.

"I can't bear to work without chatting," would she say; "it is so very dull;" and so an inane and desultory conversation was carried on, the topics being for the most part furnished by reflections on the clever sayings, and interesting doings of the children, the domineering manner of their upper nurse, and the luxuries enjoyed by the supine housekeeper, and fine-ladyish *femme de chambre*. "I assure you, dear Miss Stratford, that they are much better off than I was before we came to our fortune, and give themselves much more airs than ladies do," would the unsophisticated mistress of the mansion repeat, day after day, until the facts, strengthened by personal experience, became impressed on the mind of Selina, and the reiteration of them almost induced a state of drowsiness. The luncheon-bell alone interrupted this daily *tête-à-tête*, and an hour was devoted to discussing the culinary dainties served up by *Monsieur le Chef de Cuisine*, — an hour that seemed interminably tardy in its flight, to Selina, whose appetite rejected this extra repast, but which Mrs. Buxton approved, the hour for partaking it, being, as she seldom omitted to state, *sotto voce*, to Selina, that at which she was accustomed to dine in her former home.

After luncheon the carriage was announced, and Selina must accompany Mrs. Buxton in her daily drive; listen to the same monotonous monologue, interrupted only by her own monosyllabic assents; and return home as jaded as if the long promenade had been a pedestrian one. Then a second visit to the nursery, where she was expected to remain until it was time to dress for dinner, at which *recherché* repast, where digestion was not assisted by cheerful converse or lively sallies (as recommended by the wise epicureans of old), two of the longest and most wearisome hours in the twenty-four, were passed. Mr.

Buxton related his exploits by flood and field, being greatly addicted to fishing and shooting, told how fishes were snared, and birds, or rabbits, shot, with great satisfaction to himself at least, if not to his auditors, the novelty of such sports to him giving them a peculiar zest. "I must, however," would he say, with a solemn shake of the head, and a portentous brow, "see that my game be more strictly preserved in future. I must make a few examples of these abominable poachers and prevent my farmers from sporting, or all my shooting will be spoilt."

"You surely can't mean, my dear, to do that which I have so frequently heard you censure others for doing," said his wife, with a face full of astonishment. "Don't you remember when you went on a visit to your cousin, Mr. Everfield, how angry you were when his landlord, the Marquis of Hungerford, refused to allow you to shoot on your cousin's farm? and how hard you thought it that he should prosecute poachers with such severity."

"That may be all very well, when a man has no preserves, or large manors of his own; but you know the old proverb, 'a fellow feeling makes one wondrous kind!' and hang me if I would not feel well disposed to punish, with the utmost severity the law will admit, any of those rascals that poach on my property!"

"Well, you surprise me, my dear, after all I have heard you say, when you used to call the Marquis of Hungerford a proud, overbearing aristocrat, who seemed to think that pheasants and partridges were only to be shot by him and his peers."

"I dare say I uttered many foolish things in the days to which you refer, Sarah, for I was then a poor devil that envied the rich their possessions, but wealth, when it comes to us, makes us see most things in a different point of view."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Such were the conversations that generally passed after dinner, when the servants had withdrawn. During their presence Mrs. Buxton was too timid to be communicative, and her *caro sposo* too much occupied in rendering justice to the excellent cookery set before him, to talk much. But oh, the long, long

evenings that followed! When Selina entered the library, a torpor seemed to oppress her spirits, in anticipation of the dull and tedious hours that must intervene before she was released for the night. Mr. Buxtou took up a newspaper, with the avowed intention of perusing its contents; but scarcely had he glanced over half a dozen lines ere his eyelids gently closed, and, in a few minutes, certain loud nasal sounds announced that he had yielded to the influence of the God of sleep. Mrs. Buxton would, on such occasions, steal on tip-toe to the side of the easy chair or sofa, where he had ensconsed his person, and carefully cover his head with her scarf, contemplating him, while doing so, with the same complacent smile with which the fond mother of an only child gazes on her slumbering treasure. "I am so afraid he may catch cold; or, that he is not well," would she whisper to Selina. "He never was accustomed to sleep after dinner in our old home, but used to be as brisk and lively as a cricket, and chat with me."

"He had not then an excellent cook to tempt his appetite, nor rare wines and *liqueures* to wash down his too copious repasts," thought Selina, a reflection so natural and obvious, that she was surprised it had not occurred to the anxious wife. Mrs. Buxton was not however given to trace effect to cause, and loved her husband too fondly to reason on aught that indicated a change in his health or habits.

There sat the kind-hearted woman, casting from time to time anxious glances at the sleeper, and by no means shocked nor incommoded by his loud snoring, while Selina engaged with tapestry work, undertaken by the desire of Mrs. Buxtou, plied her task, contrasting the present dull and gloomy evenings, unbroken by reading or conversation, with the happy ones passed in the refined society of the elegant and cultivated Lady Almondbury, or in the cheerful ones spent beneath the humble roof of her worthy friends, Mr. and Mrs. Vernon. Often would she sigh when casting her eyes around on the well-filled book shelves. She thought of the treasures they contained — treasures she longed to possess, if but for a few brief hours — but which were wholly disregarded by their owners.

"*I shall* have my fourth flower done before he awakes," would

Mrs. Buxton say; "I wish we could talk while we work, that would make the evenings seem shorter; but I am so afraid of awaking him."

Glad was Selina when released for the night; and truly did she comprehend that the luxuries of life must be valueless where all intellectual pleasures are wanting. Often did she accuse herself of ingratitude to Providence for feeling so acutely the want of leisure for reading, and the dearth of all rational intercourse in her present abode. Thankful for the invariable good nature of Mr. Buxton towards her, and for the extreme kindness of his wife, she was vexed with herself for not being able to submit with more cheerfulness to the irksomeness of their society.

"Could I have but a few hours to myself in the day," would she often exclaim, "I might better bear the long and weary hours I must spend with my employer; but to be all day pinned to her side, every evening working, uncheered by a sound save the drowsy whispers of Mrs. Buxton, and the snoring of her husband, is an infliction that makes me forget the solid comforts of my situation, and how much I have to be thankful for in their kindness."

Two days after Selina had made the foregoing reflections, a letter apprised her of the death of her worthy friend Mrs. Vernon, who had expired after an illness of only a few days, leaving the faithful partner of her life a solitary sojourner on earth, bowed down by affliction. Deeply did this new stroke of adversity fall on her; and in her sorrow every selfish feeling of her own loss in this sad event was lost sight of in her pity and sympathy for the bereaved husband. Who now was to cheer his solitary hearth, for so many years the scene of rational enjoyment and comfort? Who was to partake his daily meals? to care for their being always prepared exactly according to his taste; and to enliven them by cheerful converse, and affectionate smiles, not less the result of one of the sweetest tempers, and finest natures that ever mortal was blessed with, than of a love that had from youth to age formed the basis of their mutual happiness? Who now was to talk to him of his youthful days? of those trials that had only served to endear them still more to each other? of those friends who had long de-

parted from earth, yet who were remembered with the fondness with which friends of youth are ever recalled? His long fled youth, ay, and even its pleasant reminiscences now were gone with her who had constituted the happiness of both; and a solitary, cheerless existence must henceforth be his, until summoned to join her he had lost. Gladly would Selina have gone to that now desolate house, which had hitherto been her refuge and home when needed; but with a timidity peculiar to persons in dependent positions, she knew not whether such a step might not involve results to be avoided. Mr. Vernon might think himself now bound to retain her, should she, as was probable, lose her situation by going to him. She had no claim of relationship to warrant such a proceeding; and she shrank from the thought of becoming a tax on his bounty. Many were the tears that fell on the letter she addressed to him on this occasion, every syllable it contained emanating from a heart filled with regret and sympathy for his affliction.

"Was Mrs. Vernon a near relation?" asked Mrs. Buxton when she marked the traces of grief on the face of Selina.

"No, Madam, none whatever."

"How very odd; I thought one only mourned a near cousin, so deeply as you do. I have such a number of relations, that I never formed any intimate friendships with other persons. It 's a great comfort to have a number of relations, for out of a large lot, one can choose one's friends."

Mrs. Buxton knew not how this thoughtless and common-place reflection of hers made Selina more alive to her own isolated position in life. *She* had no relations nor connexions from whom to select friends, or from whom to claim countenance or protection. She stood alone in the world, with no friend to count on, save Mr. Vernon, an aged man; and when he should be removed from earth, she should indeed be left friendless. As these sad thoughts passed through her mind, a ray of comfort was admitted into it, by the belief that, with those with whom she was at present dwelling, she might count on *a quiet* and assured, though not a happy home; and, after a conscientious discharge of her duties for some years, merit and win

their esteem and friendship. They seemed good and kind-hearted; and why might she not hope to attach them to her by ties of regard, and habits of long and daily intercourse, warmed, at last, into friendship. Yes! she would no more, with a repining spirit, sink into gloom at the monotony, and want of all intellectual enjoyment, of her existence. She would be thankful for the good nature shown to her, and be patient, if not satisfied, with her lot.

How blind are mortals to the future, and how little can they count even on the present. While Selina was calculating on a diligent exercise of her abilities in her present abode, and on the good results likely to emanate from such conduct, Fate, through the medium of one of the ignoble tools often empowered to work its decrees, was busy at work to defeat the hopes of the poor orphan. Mrs. Price, the head nurse of Mrs. Buxton, had usurped an influence over that lady from the moment she entered her service, until the arrival of Selina. The reign was one of terror, and though felt to be such, was endured by the timid and ignorant Mrs. Buxton, from the awe inspired in her mind by the stern, and often insolent, airs of the termagant. Taking advantage of her inexperience, nurse dictated the laws and regulations of the nursery, according to the mode, as she asserted, adopted by the duchess of this, and marchioness of that, her suggestions scarcely allowing the frightened Mrs. Buxton to have a voice in the management of her own children, or an entrance into the nursery, except at stated hours, named by Mrs. Price. The airs of importance assumed by this vulgar woman towards her employer, often amounting to positive insolence, had been checked by the presence of Selina, and, without her, Mrs. Buxton now never entered the nursery. The nurse saw at a glance that Miss Stratford was not a person to submit to the impertinence offered with impunity to Mrs. Buxton, or to let that lady remain long in error with regard to the necessity of putting a stop to the insolence of the head nurse, as she loved to style herself. Her place was too lucrative a one to be lost: she had higher wages, and many more perquisites, acquired owing to the ignorance of her present mistress, of the customs and usages of the rich and great, than she had ever enjoyed in the noble families whose high-sounding titles she was wont to quote to

the *parvenue*, as precedents on every occasion. To lose her place was therefore not to be thought of, and yet to be compelled to treat a nobody, an ignorant upstart, as she termed her mistress, with the respect paid to duchesses, marchionesses, and countesses, was an alternative almost equally repugnant to her feelings. If Miss Stratford could only be got rid of, all might go on as before. *She* might retain her place and her empire, and, with the other upper servants of the establishment, continue to take advantage of, and profit by, the ignorance of their employers. It did not enter into her head that another governess would inevitably take the place of Miss Stratford, if that young lady could be got rid of, or if so, she trusted to the chance, that the new comer might be less likely to interfere with her views than the present. The truth was, Selina's reserve had increased her dread and hatred. But how was Miss Stratford to be got rid of? Ay, there was the difficulty; for, from the great liking it was quite evident Mrs. Buxton had taken to her, and the great use she was of in teaching that lady, Mrs. Nurse felt it would be no easy task to dislodge her. If she knew anything of the former life of Miss Stratford — in what families she had lived, how long or short a time she had remained in each — it would be easy to invent some tale (Mrs. Price had a wonderful fertility of imagination) which might get her sent away. Mrs. Nurse pondered long and deeply on this subject.

How provoking that Miss Stratford had no maid, and for the first time Mrs. Price regretted that governesses were not permitted such luxuries, for had a maid been in the case, how easily could she have learned every particular, of not only what the servant knew, but also what she imagined and how soon a structure of falsehood could be erected on a small base of truth, no one knew better. Mrs. Nurse kept up a frequent correspondence with a nephew of hers, a young man named Stubbings, a clerk in a solicitor's office. This nephew greatly resembled his aunt in more than one of his propensities — he liked gossip, and particularly scandal; had a lively imagination for giving a high colour to the tales he repeated, and sometimes won golden opinions in the shape *of half*-sovereigns, sent up under the seal from his aunt, in return *for the* gossip he sent her down in his letters. She was proud to

show the good writing, the decent letter-paper, the seal with a crest of a lion rampant, her own gift, impressed on the letters from this nephew, and proud also to show the address of her's to him in return, with the "Esq." never forgotten. — "Who knows," thought Mrs. Price, "but Jim may be able to find out something about this girl. She has sufficient good looks to have excited attention, and her name is not so common an one as to be mistaken or forgotten. Jim Stubbings knows something of every one; he is such a sharp clever lad that no one can find out things like him. What a fool I was not to think of it before. Yes, I 'll write to him at once, and tell him to make enquiries." The letter was dispatched, and in due course of time an answer received.

"You say that I know everything, dear aunt," wrote the hopeful nephew, "and I really begin to think I do: but that 's all owing to having my wits kept continually rubbed up in the office, where we have more sharp practice than in most other solicitors' offices in London. — Tell me Miss Stratford's christian name, for without that, I cannot be certain in my information. The search too, will cost me something in hack cabs and in treats, for no one will tell anything without being treated, and I am very low in cash just now; indeed, I generally am, and there is no clerk in the office, (and we have no less than ten,) who is so ill off as I am. You don't know how hard I find it to keep up the appearance of a gentleman, without doing which, I should be looked down on directly by my fellow-clerks. — Your affectionate nephew,

JAMES STUBBINGS."

"He 's a deep dog," exclaimed his aunt, when she had perused the letter, "he knows how to touch me on the tender point, for it 's the great wish of my heart to make him a gentleman, and to be able to say I have a nephew a solicitor. And a pretty sum it has cost me too, to make him what he is. Well, well, it can't be helped, it costs almost as much to make a gentleman as to maintain one: but he 'll soon be able to set up for himself, and when I can see a brass plate on his door with Mr. Stubbings, solicitor, engraved on it, I 'll be happy. I 'll send him up a couple of sovereigns. But how am I to find out Miss Stratford's christian name?

She 's always spoken to and of, as Miss Stratford. I 'll go to the laundry and see the name on her linen. But that 'll be only an initial, and that 's no great use. I 'll get Miss Buxton to ask her name; yes, that 's a good thought. "My dear, my dear," and the wily nurse addressed the eldest of the children under her care, "mind when Miss Stratford comes here to-day, you ask her what 's her name."

"Her name is Miss Stratford," replied the child.

"Yes, but she has another name too. Your name is Miss Buxton, but you have also another name, you are called Sarah."

"But I don't want to know Miss Stratford's other name; and mamma said, little girls must not ask questions."

"Stupid little brute!" murmured Mrs. Price, *sotto voce*. "How she takes after her mother. But if I give you a nice new doll for asking Miss Stratford's name?"

"Oh! if you give me a pretty doll, I 'll ask Miss Stratford's name."

"Now, mind you don't forget."

"No, I 'll not forget the doll."

No sooner had Selina entered the nursery that day, than the little girl ran up to her, and pulling her robe, exclaimed. "Tell me your name, — tell me your name?"

"Selina, my dear," was the reply.

"Give me the pretty doll, Mrs. Price," said the child, running back to the nurse, whose face grew crimson at this *exposé* of her having prompted the question. But she need not have been alarmed. Neither Mrs. Buxton, nor Selina, had the least suspicion that the question originated in aught save the curiosity natural to children, and there the matter rested; the little girl that evening receiving the price of her docility, out of the hoard of dolls and toys taken from the children, to be doled out to them again as bribes, to effect the purposes of their artful and unprincipled nurse.

The next post conveyed to Mr. James Stubbings the name of Selina, with two sovereigns, and an entreaty for a speedy answer.

"*The old* lady is about some mischief, I 'll warrant me," observed Mr. James Stubbings, when he saw the gold. "She 'd

never give me money, if she hadn't some particular object in view. Never did the most loyal subjects love their sovereigns as I do mine," continued he, repeating for the twentieth time an attempt at wit, perpetrated whenever his aunt sent him a coin with the impress of Majesty on it. "Well, but it 's odd enough, here is the very name that was in the settlement, drawn up in the office, of an annuity of one hundred a-year, from Lord Almondbury to Selina Stratford, spinster. I know his lordship well enough by character, and a great libertine he is too, by all accounts. He wouldn't give Selina Stratford, spinster, one hundred a-year for her life, for nothing, I know. No, no! he 's no such fool! But what can my precious old aunt have to do with this lady? Probably, the said Selina Stratford, spinster, is hard up for cash, and wants to sell or pawn the aforesaid annuity; and the old lady, who I have always suspected to be much better off in money matters than she lets out, is disposed to buy it. Well, no matter what the motive for her inquiries may be, I must answer them, and I am thankful to have made two sovereigns by the job."

"Oh, ho! my fine lady!" exclaimed Mrs. Nurse, as she laid down a letter from her hopeful nephew. "Much better than I expected. There 's no occasion to invent any story here; it 's all ready, cut and dried to the hand, as one may say. Yet who 'd have thought it? and so young, too. Yes, yes, Jim is right; she wouldn't have got a lord making a settlement on her for nothing, I 'd be bound. And I know something of *this* lord, too. I knew a pretty nurse-maid, who lost her character in his house; and he gave her fifty pounds. I have heard what a sad rake and libertine he was. But this lady, so stuck up and reserved; giving herself airs to *me*, too, and pretending to be astonished and shocked, when I let out a little of my mind before her to Mrs. Buxton! *Won't* I get her out of the place before long, that 's all? She 'll find that I 'm more than a match for her, or my name is not Sarah Price. Let me see how I had best set about it? If I tell it to Mrs. Buxton, she is so taken with her, that she won't believe a word of it; besides, she 'd suspect me of jealousy, or some other such motive." Mrs. Price paused for some minutes, and then exclaimed, — "Yes, now I have it. I 'll write an anonymous letter to Mr.

Buxton, and another to his wife, telling them that the whole neighbourhood is surprised that they keep in their family a young person of such bad character, and who was known to be the mistress of Lord Almondbury, who settled a hundred a-year on her to get rid of her. I 'll add, that, if they doubt the intelligence, they have only to apply to Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor, in Lincoln's Inn Fields, the solicitors, who drew up the settlement. I 'll send the two letters in a disguised hand to my nephew, who will drop them in the post in London, and so all suspicion will be turned from me. Mrs. Buxton was expressing her surprise and regret, the other day to her maid, that no persons, except Mrs. Grimthorpe, had invited Miss Stratford to their houses. Just as if nobility ever invited governesses, and especially the governesses of such upstarts as these Buxtons. But that 's all her ignorance, expecting such things. Now she 'll be sure to think that the reason Miss Stratford has not been asked, is that the neighbours know all about her, and this will settle the matter; for, though she is a good-natured fool, she has not courage to keep any one in her house a single day, after hearing that the lords and ladies around here would not associate with her. She wants to pass for a lady; I can plainly see she does, and she knows that appear to be one, she must not set herself up against her betters."

The two letters were written and despatched. Mr. James Stubbings put them into the post, and in due time they reached their destination, where they produced an effect on the minds of their recipients, that might have satisfied to the utmost the malice of Mrs. Price.

CHAPTER XXIX.

For some time Mrs. Buxton was disposed to conceal from her husband the painful communication she had received. She had felt a growing attachment to Selina, whose gentleness and amiable manner had won her regard. Her society and conversation, at once instructive and amusing, had been a relief to the vapid mind of that lady, who now, by the alteration in her position, found *herself* obliged to confide to others, those household occupations,

and that nursery superintendence which had formerly filled up her days and abridged their length. She was conscious that she had derived great advantages from her contact with Miss Stratford. She could now preside at her own table without committing any remarkable solecism in *les usages et bienséances* of civilized life, and be an inoffensive, though not an amusing hostess in her drawing-room. She felt, that she owed all this and more to Selina's unassuming and judicious instructions and advice, and not prone to be ungrateful, she would willingly have evinced her sense of the debt, by continued kindness to her. But, when the thought of what might be said among "the grandees" in her neighbourhood, if she continued to retain a person of suspected character presented itself, her natural kindness of heart was vanquished. How often does the *qu'en dira-t-on*, that dread of common minds, take the place of judgment in influencing their decision, and urge them to adopt a conduct very different to that which their own better feelings would dictate! "And yet," said Mrs. Buxton, as she again and again perused the anonymous letter, "it is difficult to believe that a fallen woman could be so modest in her demeanour, so perfectly correct in her manner! Never would a doubt of her propriety have entered my thoughts. After this, who can I ever trust? so good, so irreproachable as she seemed."

Mrs. Buxton made a very common mistake in this reasoning. Many suppose that every good quality departs, when chastity, that most essential of feminine virtues, no longer sanctifies the temple that should enshrine it. But the examples are not few of modesty surviving to mourn the death of her sister, virtue, and of a consciousness of having sinned, rendering those who feel it, more anxious to cultivate every other womanly virtue, in order to atone, if possible, for the loss of that which is the greatest of them all. Hence the erroneous opinions entertained of those who have sinned; and who, therefore, are believed to be as immodest as they are sinful.

"Yes, I must show this letter to my husband," said Mrs. Buxton, after long debating the point with herself, "it would not be right to keep it from him: men know the world better than women, and what to do in such emergencies."

She had hardly uttered this soliloquy, when her *caro sposo* entered, holding an open letter in his hand, and his countenance unusually grave.

"Look here, Sarah," said he, handing her the epistle, "this is a very disagreeable business. Who 'd have thought of her turning out to be such a person?"

Mrs. Buxton only read a line, when she perceived that the letter addressed to her husband was a fac-simile of the one she had received by the same post.

"See, my dear," observed she, much agitated, "here is a similar one written to me. I 'm so shocked. If the statement should prove true, what a hypocrite! what a dreadful person she must be!"

"I can hardly believe it," replied Mr. Buxton, "for if she was the sort of person here represented," and he pointed to the letter, "I, who know the world, and who certainly understand your sex," and he drew himself up self-complacently, "would have detected something in her manner that would have opened my eyes at once. I have been civil to her too, yes, devilish civil," and he cast a glance at the large mirror near to which he was standing, and drew up his shirt collars, "and when a fellow is not worse-looking, if not better-looking than his neighbours, and is as civil to a pretty girl as I have been to this person, I am convinced, that were she not strictly virtuous, she would have let him see that his civilities were not thrown away."

Mr. Buxton assumed, while speaking, such a libertine air, that, shocked and surprised, his wife burst into a fit of tears, and sunk into a chair.

"What 's the matter, Sarah, what do you cry for?"

"Oh! Mr. Bux-ton," sobbed his better half, "I never expected tha-t you would h-ave such wick-ed thoug-hts in your head. Oh! dear, oh! dear," and she sobbed still more, "how little I knew your heart. So you ha-ve been so very ci-vil as you c-all it, to Miss Stratford, and I ne-ver sus-pec-ted what bad thoughts were passing in your mind. And you look so diff-e-rent too — quite hardened like. Oh! I can't bear to see you so changed," and the poor woman's tears fell faster.

"Stuff, nonsense, my dear Sarah, you mustn't make a fool of yourself; I assure you I never gave a thought to Miss Stratford," and the speaker assumed the same air of libertinism that had previously produced so painful an effect on his wife. It was an air that said as plain as an air could speak, "If I *did* happen to wish to win a pretty woman's favour, I should only have to make the attempt in order to succeed."

"And so long as we have been married too," said Mrs. Buxton, still shedding tears, "and I your first and only love, as I have so often heard you say, and now to hear you speak of knowing woman so well, just as if you had been one of those horrid rakes who think of nothing in the world but running after them. Oh! I never expected Mr. Buxton, that you would make me feel as I now do."

"Why to hear you talk, Sarah, one would really imagine that I had been playing the deuce. Come, dry up your tears, my dear, you have no manner of cause for them. 'Pon my soul you hav'n't. There, let me kiss you, and no more crying; and let us at once decide what is to done in this vexatious business."

"I 'm determined Miss Stratford shall go," said Mrs. Buxton, "and what 's more, I 'll never again have a handsome governess."

"But would it not be cruel as well as unjust, to send the poor girl away without sifting this tale?"

"Poor girl, indeed; I have no patience with you, Mr. Buxton. I see you want to have her kept here; but it shan't be. Nothing will induce me to suffer her to remain."

Mrs. Buxton, the quiet, well tempered Mrs. Buxton, hitherto so passive and gentle, had now become an angry and unreasonable woman, excited by the pangs of jealousy for the first time awakened in her heart.

"I assure you, my dear, I by no means wish to have Miss Stratford retained; but as the charge against her is brought only by an anonymous letter, we owe it to her and to ourselves too, not to act in it, until by a reference to Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor, the persons named in the letter, we have ascertained the truth. I know something of these solicitors, and will at once write to

inquire whether they drew a deed of settlement from Lor
mondbury to Miss Selina Stratford. If they reply in the affi
tive, there can no longer be a doubt, and their answer I shall
the day after to-morrow."

"To please you, Mr. Buxton, I will say or do nothing ir
painful business, until the answer comes; but I warn you,
even should it disprove the statement in the letter, I coul
bear to have her continue in this house. It may be wrong, it
be foolish, but I can't help it. Suspicions *have* come int
head, all through your rakish looks and manner when you s
of her; and I feel I never again shall be the same happy wor
was, when I thought you knew nothing, nor cared about
woman but your own wife."

Mr. Buxton thought it rather a good joke to pass in the mi
his wife as a man who *might* please others of her sex, and at
enjoyed her jealousy, which was gratifying to his vanity; b
now began to think he had gone too far with his pleasantry,
as he marked the flushed cheeks and flashing eyes of his wif
occurred to him that his comfort might be very much impede
not destroyed, by the demon he had evoked in her previ
tranquil breast.

"I can't bear to see her after all this," said Mrs. Buxton.
know I shall be sure to let her perceive by my manner that
not right, whatever pains I may take to conceal my feelings.
not go down stairs to-day, or to-morrow, and that will sav
the annoyance of meeting her."

"Do as you please, my dear, about that."

"Oh! then, you wish me to remain in my room, Mr. Bu
I suppose, that you may have a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Strat
But I 'll disappoint you, that I will. I *won't* stay in my r
not if I were dying would I give you such an opportunity of
alone with that girl."

"'Pon my soul, Sarah, you are making a great fool of y
self. I merely assented to your own proposal of remaining in
room, thinking, as you said, that it would be painful to yo
meet that poor girl."

"Mr. Buxton, Mr. Buxton, you will drive me mad, d

what you will do, with your poor girl, indeed; as if I am not the real person to be pitied. Oh! did I ever think you would give me such pain?" And here Mrs. Buxton's tears streamed afresh.

"You will make me lose all patience, indeed you will, Sarah, by persevering in such folly. There 's the clock striking two. The luncheon bell will ring in a moment; wipe your eyes, and go down as usual and I will write to Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor."

Mrs. Buxton did as she was told, and descended to the dining room, when the calm aspect of Selina almost made her disbelieve the statement contained in the anonymous letter, and even chased every jealous feeling that had, for the last two hours, been torturing her breast.

There is an indescribable something in the countenance and manner of a virtuous woman, which although often imperceptible to men, who are ever prone to view objects through the distorted medium of their own corrupt notions, which appeals with irresistible force to the breast to women. Mrs. Buxton felt this influence when she looked at the open brow, and the steady, clear eye of Selina, which met her glance with an expression of frankness and truthfulness that re-established her former confidence.

"How could I have doubted her?" said she to herself; and a blush of shame mounted to her cheeks. And yet, though now convinced of Selina's innocence, Mrs. Buxton was ill at ease in the presence of her governess. She was dissatisfied with herself for her having put faith in an anonymous letter; she was ashamed of the jealousy she had displayed to her husband, and yet she knew her own weakness to be such, that she had not moral courage enough, though firmly believing Selina's purity, to retain her beneath her roof in defiance of the opinion which the anonymous letter stated, was entertained against her by the grandees of the neighbourhood. How well did the wily nurse prove her knowledge of the character of her mistress in the letter, when she inserted the paragraph relative to the neighbourhood being cognizant of the alleged frailty of Miss Stratford!

Such was the weakness of Mrs. Buxton, and so great was her respect for nobility, that could she have had the most undeniable proofs of the innocence of Selina, joined to the innate conviction

which she entertained herself on that point, she would not dare to retain her whom her great neighbours condemned. How strange are the workings of the human heart! Mrs. Buxton, though really liking Miss Stratford, wished, yes, in her secret thoughts desired, that the statement in the anonymous letter should be confirmed by the answer of Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor, in order that she might be justified for sending Miss Stratford away. Such are the lengths to which weak minds can be carried, when the fear of, not the world's dread laugh, but of the comments of a few country neighbours, for whom no sentiment of esteem or friendship is entertained, can urge a woman, not naturally hard-hearted or ill disposed, to such injustice and cruelty.

The answer from Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor arrived, and the writer, after denying the right of any gentleman to inquire into the transactions between their house and any of their clients, stated, that respect for the high character of Mr. Buxton, of whom they knew nothing but that he had lately inherited a great fortune, and had once called at their office, about purchasing the right of a small manor adjoining his own large one, induced the writer to swerve for once from the usual system of secrecy of the house of Culpepper and Scrutor, and to admit that a deed of settlement had been drawn up in their office, by the instructions of the Right Honourable Lord Almondbury, granting, for her natural life, an annuity of one hundred guineas a year to Miss Selina Stratford. It was added that, in making this unusual disclosure, reliance was placed in the honour and discretion of Mr. Buxton, not to reveal what had been confided to him.

"Yes, she must go," said Mrs. Buxton, as soon as she had perused the letter handed to her by her husband.

"But what if this annuity were granted to her for no lapse of virtue, but as an honourable reward for good conduct?" observed Mr. Buxton.

"If she were an elderly woman, who had brought up his children from infancy, and so was pensioned off, there might be a chance of the matter being as you say, my dear, but think of her youth, and his lordship's character as a libertine, as the letter *stated*, and you must admit that Miss Stratford could not have got

an annuity for having brought up a family, she being herself but a very young woman."

"Still I cannot believe her guilty; I cannot, indeed, my dear Sarah."

"But, innocent or guilty, she must go. We could not think of keeping her with us, in defiance of the opinion of all the nobility in the neighbourhood. Already have they marked their sense of her conduct by never including her in any of their invitations to us. If this does not show their opinion, I know not what could."

"But, if it so happened that these great lords and ladies *don't* invite governesses in general, and therefore meant no slight to Miss Stratford, in particular? and this may, after all, be the case; and you and I, my dear Sarah, not being acquainted with the etiquette in such matters, may have taken as an affront to her, that which is but a general custom."

"Why, you, Mr. Buxton, saw the statement in the letters as well as I did; and as the part about the annuity has been proved true, depend upon it all the rest is."

"I wish I knew any one that I could inquire of, as to whether it 's the custom to invite governesses when their employers are asked out?"

"Pray, my dear, make no such inquiry. It would only get us laughed at among the whole of this proud set in our neighbourhood, for showing our ignorance."

"All I can say, Sarah, is, that if you felt as I do, convinced of this poor girl's innocence, in spite of the malicious anonymous letter, and the admission on the part of the solicitors, hang me if I would not let her remain here, without caring a fig for what all the grandees in the neighbourhood might think, or say, about the matter."

"I am surprised, Mr. Buxton, to see you get so very warm on this subject; and more than that, Mr. Buxton, I see plainly you have set your heart on keeping this girl here, and I will not consent to have any one under the same roof with me whose character is the topic of all the noble families around us."

"Well, let her go. Anything for a quiet life; but I really thought you had more heart in you, Sarah, ay, and more moral

courage too, than to throw over a poor girl, whose innocence you say you believe, out of dread of what lords and ladies may say."

"And I thought, Mr. Buxton, that you had less heart to spare, than to be ready to turn a Don Quixote for a person who you now know, beyond a doubt, has received an annuity from one of the greatest libertines in England!" and Mrs. Buxton's cheeks grew red, and tears of anger started to her eyes, as she finished the sentence.

"Send her away, send her away, in God's name, Sarah! and let me never hear the poor girl's name again."

"Ay, there you go again. Poor girl, indeed! I know not why you should call her poor girl! But how had I best tell her that I have no longer occasion for her services?"

"Ah! I see you are ashamed of yourself! But — but — spare me the angry remonstrance I see hovering on your lips. If you feel reluctant to communicate personally with her, write a note, and say that we shall be compelled to leave home for an indefinite time, therefore must part from her, and that she is at liberty to go as soon as she pleases. You ought, in common decency, to make her a handsome present, for you must allow, Sarah, that she has been of the greatest possible service to us here."

"So she has, my dear, and I will gladly make her whatever present you think I ought; but I really can't write a falsehood. If I say we are going from home, we must positively go somewhere for a little while; for I could not reconcile it to my conscience to write a story."

"Well, I 've no objection to go any where you like. And I 'll give you fifty pounds, over and above her salary, to make a present to Miss Stratford."

The note was written and despatched to Selina, whose astonishment at its contents may easily be imagined. The style of the note, too, though meant to be civil, if not kind, was so constrained, so formal, that, as she perused the letter, she felt that there was more than met the eye in it; that the sentiments in her favour, so often avowed by Mrs. Buxton, must have undergone a total revolution, before it could have been written. In what could this *change* have originated? was the next thought that presented itself

tained by her excellent and tried friend, could not be shaken by the caprice and injustice of others, so no doubt of a warm and affectionate welcome occurred to add to her chagrin at her abrupt dismissal.

CHAPTER XXX.

The meeting between Selina and her old and kind friend, was very trying to the feelings of both; and yet the conviction of the perfect sympathy in their grief, was soothing and consolatory to each. The worthy man found relief in dwelling on the many excellent qualities of his departed wife, to one whom he knew had always duly appreciated them; and Selina was gratified by hearing that, to the last, Mrs. Vernon had retained an almost maternal affection for her. How did the vacant chair, the little work-table and footstool, so many years used by *her* whom they should never more see on earth, affect Selina! She found the bereaved husband terribly shaken by the blow that had destroyed his domestic happiness. His health, previously so good, was now much impaired, and his spirits had received a shock not to be overcome at his advanced age.

People are apt to imagine, that such afflictions as that under which Mr. Vernon was now suffering, are most heavily felt ere age has blunted the feelings, and when the vigour of youth adds poignancy to them. Perhaps grief may then be most vehement, just as fevers are more active with the youthful than with the aged; but if sorrow be less violent with the old than with the young, is its duration not much longer, and its influence more baneful? Habit, which forges the strongest chains, has rivetted those that bind an affectionate old couple together during a union of many years, so closely, that when the link is broken by death, life becomes insupportable to the survivor. With the lost partner of his joys and sorrows, his good and evil fortune, departs all the pleasant memories of his youth and manhood, and he enters the dark evening of life, uncheered by the companion who had shared its sunshine. The position of his young friend was the sole thought, on this side *of the grave*, that drew Mr. Vernon from the grief that

was undermining his health, and rapidly conducting him
tomb that had so lately closed over the mortal remains of l
parted wife. When told of the unexpected and abrupt ma
which Selina had been dismissed, and informed of the e
kindness she had experienced, up to the last three days
abode with Mr. and Mrs. Buxton, he felt convinced that ther
exist some unexplained cause to account for such conduct
testimonial in Selina's favour, written by Mrs. Buxton, did
tisfy him. There lurked, he was persuaded, some mystery,
in justice to Selina, ought to be laid bare, and he determine
as far as it lay in his power, it should be solved. He wrot
friend who had applied to him when Selina was engaged, a
manded, as an act of justice, that Mr. Buxton should exp
this their mutual acquaintance, the cause of Miss Stratford
den dismissal. The tone in which this request was made
from Mr. Buxton a statement of the whole affair. One of th
nymous letters written to him was forwarded for inspectio
great was the shock and disgust Selina's friend experience
he perused it. He instantly appealed to Lord Almondbury,
return from the continent he had noticed announced in a
paper a few days before, related the whole affair to him, a
treated his lordship to justify Miss Stratford.

Lord Almondbury, indignant at the calumny, imme
wrote to Mr. Buxton, stating that, at the dying request of l
parted wife, he had instructed his lawyers to draw up a d
settlement, of one hundred pounds per annum, to Miss Str
for her life, as a testimonial of the high opinion, and warm e
entertained for that young lady by the deceased countess, wh
also marked her regard by other gifts. That, to his sincere r
the settlement had been rejected, as had also been the re
offer made to Miss Stratford to continue the governess
daughter; and his lordship added, that so great was the resp
felt for the principles and conduct of the young lady, that he
no one under whose care and tuition he would so readily pla
child. But Lord Almondbury was determined the affair shou
rest there; for he went to Messrs. Culpepper and Scrutor, se
reprehended them for their indiscretion, dismissed them fro

management of his affairs, and proved, by destroying the deed of settlement in their presence, that it had never been accepted, though he took especial care to explain that it was by the desire of his departed countess it had been drawn up.

Great was the surprise and confusion of Mr. and Mrs. Buxton when Lord Almondbury's letter reached them. "Well, my dear, you will remember that I never believed Miss Stratford guilty," observed Mrs. Buxton.

"And I am quite sure *I* did not," replied her husband. "If my advice had been followed," added he, "the poor girl never should have left the house."

"But with our noble neighbours," said Mrs. Buxton, "what could we have done?"

"Not cared a fig about them. They'll go anywhere where they get good dinners and wine, like mine."

"Nevertheless, my dear, it would have been very disagreeable to have exposed ourselves to observations, perhaps to slights, on account of a person who was no relation."

"I 'll tell you, Sarah, for the twentieth time though it may be, that we are too rich to meet with slights from our neighbours, and as for their observations, who will have the impudence to repeat them to us; so what shall we be the worse for their spite?"

"Ah! so you always say; but I have not your nerves, my dear."

The anxiety to vindicate Miss Stratford, had, for a brief period, withdrawn her kind friend, Mr. Vernon, from the all-engrossing grief that was evidently hurrying him to the grave. But when he saw her fair fame re-established, his thoughts relapsed into their previous sadness, and not even the presence of Selina, much and affectionately as he regarded her, could cheer his drooping spirits. When, however, she proposed again to seek a situation, he so strongly objected to the measure, and declared that her society being now his only consolation, it would be unkind, nay more, cruel of her to leave him to die alone, as he said, that Selina consented to prolong her stay, using every effort in her power to render her sojourn beneath his roof a source of comfort to her benefactor. She read aloud to him, consulted his

feeble appetite in the choice of his food, wrote his letters, and was ever near to induce him to enter into conversation, instead of indulging the mournful reminiscences, or moody reveries, into which he was prone to drop. Warmly and deeply did he feel this unceasing care and attention; and often did he regret that fortune had denied him the power to reward it.

With great difficulty Selina got him to consent to see a physician; but the one called in took an opportunity of informing her that his aid was useless, as nothing could retard the progress of the disease, a total breaking up of the constitution, that must soon consign her only friend to the grave. The friends and neighbours of Mr. Vernon were constant in their visits to him. To the most valued of them he recommended his adopted daughter, as he loved to call her, entreating them to assist her in finding a situation, he, alas! not having the means to enable her to subsist without one.

And now every day marked how rapidly the sick man was sinking; and as the conviction was forced on her who watched over him with filial tenderness, she felt her gratitude and affection increase, and add poignancy to her regret. It was a touching sight to see that young creature bending over the couch of the dying man, watching, with tearful eyes, his already death-like face, and trying to catch his weak and trembling accents. Every hour seemed to threaten to be the last of his mortal career. He no longer recognized those around him, or was conscious when spoken to. Such was the state of affairs when a woman, of most unprepossessing appearance, and vulgar manners, arrived at his house. She was about sixty years of age, corpulent, and unwieldy in person, yet with an activity of mind, and energy of purpose, not often met with. "I am just arrived to see my poor dear cousin," said this person, forcing her way to the bed of the dying man, and applying a handkerchief to her eyes. "Ah!" resumed she, "I see it will all soon be over with him in this world. I must have Mr. Praywell to come to him, and see if he cannot save his poor sinful soul."

Selina looked at this strange intruder with mingled surprise *and alarm,* and her expressive countenance probably revealed her

feelings, for the stranger, throwing herself into the easy chair by the bedside, provided for the accommodation of Selina, stared steadily at her, and, with the air of being perfectly at home, coolly said, "Pray, who are you? I know my cousin, poor man, never had a child. His wife, who was no better than she should be, and turned him against his relations, had none of her own, that ever I could hear of; indeed, she was a woman of no family, and he greatly demeaned himself by marrying. I am therefore at a loss to know what claims *you* not being a relative, have to be established here as mistress of the house, and head nurse, as one may say? You 'll excuse my freedom; but it has a mighty strange appearance to see a young, yes, and a pretty looking girl too, living with a man in this sort of way. I, being the next relation to the poor old man lying there, his first cousin, and heir-at-law to whatever he leaves behind him, have a right to know why you, who are nothing to him, are here, as if you were mistress of the house?"

"I am here by Mr. Vernon's own desire, Madam. His late wife, as well as himself, extended their protection and kindness to me, and for many years have treated me as their adopted child!" and the recollection of the affection of the excellent couple brought tears into the eyes of Selina.

"Adopted child, indeed!" reiterated the rude stranger. "It's a nice thing for people to be taking to other men's children, when they have kindred of their own. What would Mr. Praywell say to such doings, I should like to know? So here you have been living in clover, on the fat of the land, as one may say," and the speaker glanced around inquiringly at the comfortable chamber; "and all at the expense of a man who is nothing on earth to you, while I, who am his first cousin, have been in want of many, if not all, the comforts I was accustomed to. I declare it 's a burning shame, so it is; and the state he is in," and she pointed to the poor speechless, sightless man, seems quite a judgment on him!

"Madam, I must request you not to mention his name with disrespect. He was the best, the kindest of men!" and here Selina's words were broken by sobs.

"And I 'll take leave, Miss, to tell you, that as I am his relation, and you are nothing to him, I am not be dictated to. I dare say he might be the kindest of men to *you;* old fools in their dotage generally are, when they fall into the hands of artful and designing young women. But he never showed any kindness to *me*, except two or three times sending me a trifle of money when I wrote to him I was in distress, so I need not be expected to act the hypocrite, and cry my eyes out, like some folk. Now, it 's my opinion, Miss, that if you have any decency left, the best thing you can do is to take yourself off, and leave the dying man to be looked after by his own relation, who is the natural person to close his eyes."

"You must permit me, Madam, to be the best judge of my own conduct," said Selina, with grave dignity; "and, while Mr. Vernon lives, I will not leave him."

"We 'll soon see that when Mr. Praywell comes. Yes, you 'll find out who has a real right to be mistress here."

The female servant, who had entered a few minutes before, having heard the threats of the audacious intruder, whispered Miss Stratford not to mind her, and that she would step off to Mr. Steadfast, and bring him to protect her.

"I 'll have no whisperings or underhand doings here," said the stranger. "My cousin, it is quite clear, has only a few hours to live, and I am the proper and natural person to take charge of him and his property. I 'll have Mr. Praywell to come and attend to his spiritual wants. *He* will arouse the sleeping conscience of the dying sinner, and make him repent his unnatural conduct to his relations, of whom I am the last."

The dying man moaned, and Selina flew to his pillow. The stranger followed her example, as fast as her obesity would permit; and, while Selina bent down to catch his accents, in case he should speak, she, with the voice of a stentor, shouted in his ear, "Cousin, you are dying. Think of your sinful soul, and repent your guilt ere it be too late. It is *I*, Sarah Muckridge, *your* own first cousin, the only relation you have in the world, *who is* now speaking to you."

"In pity," said Selina, her voice tremulous from emotion, "do not disturb his last hours."

"What, would you have him die without repentance? rush into the presence of his Maker without having asked *His* pardon? aye, and my pardon too, for his manifold sins; not the least of which was, his neglect of me, and his keeping you here, setting an example of sinfulness, disgraceful to a man of his age."

Again the dying man uttered a faint moan. "He hears me, he hears me," exclaimed Mrs. Muckridge. "You repent your shameful doings, don't you, cousin, and renounce Satan and his young woman, the sharer of your sin?"

Selina shuddered, and became pale as marble; for now for the first time did she comprehend the gross meaning of the speeches of the dreadful woman before her.

"Cousin, I say," resumed Mrs. Muckridge, "your last hour is come. Implore the forgiveness of your offended God, and of man, for the evil example you have given."

These words were spoken in so loud a tone of voice, as to be heard by Mr. Steadfast, who had just entered the hall beneath, and who hastily ascended to the chamber of his friend to interpose between him and the harsh termagant who was disturbing his last moments. As he entered, Mr. Vernon opened his eyes, fixed them with an expression of unutterable fondness on Selina, who was kneeling by his bedside, then glanced with evident dislike at Mrs. Muckridge, and cast a look of earnest appeal to Mr. Steadfast.

"Sinful man, sinful man!" exclaimed the hardened woman. "See how even at his last hour he looked at the partner of his guilt, with a fondness which proves that his stubborn heart is a stranger to repentance."

The dying man's eye rebuked this speech, and for a moment it was lighted up with intelligence. He endeavoured to speak, but the effort was unavailing, and in a few minutes a loud sigh proclaimed that all was over.

"Go to the Golden Lion round the corner of the street," said Mrs. Muckridge to the female servant, who stood weeping by the bed, "and tell Mr. Praywell to come here immediately."

The servant took no notice of the order, though uttered in a most authoritative tone. "Go, I say," repeated Mrs. Muckridge.

"Pray, Madam, by what right have you intruded here, and disturbed the dying moments of one of the most excellent, the most respected of men?" inquired Mr. Steadfast.

"Before I answer your impertinent question, I must ascertain by what authority you presume to ask it?" replied Mrs. Muckridge, her face red with anger.

"As the executor of my departed friend, and for the present his representative here."

"Oh! if you are his executor that alters the case, and I shall not object to inform you who I am. — My name is Muckridge; I am first cousin and sole relative to the deceased, and as such came here to take care of him, and endeavour in his last hours to make him sensible of his wickedness."

"You must, whatever your degree of relationship to my departed friend may be, know little of his life and character, when you presume to accuse him of wickedness."

"What do you call his having this young woman here?" and she pointed with a contemptuous gesture to Selina: "what right had she to live with him, I should like to know, unless the right of sin?"

"Hold your impious tongue, woman, and shame not the virtuous young creature, who was to him as a daughter, by such foul, such calumnious insinuations."

"I scorn to use insinuations, and assert at once, that as no tie of relationship existed between him and that weeping Magdalen there," pointing at Selina, "she had no right to be here, and would not have taken such an outrageous step, if she had the slightest regard for her character."

"And I assert, that you are a shameless slanderer of the dead and of the living," said Mr. Steadfast; "and I command you at once to leave this house, and not compel me to have the police to expel you."

"Ho! ho! I see how it is. You are the worthy friend and *companion* of the sinful old fool, who is gone to answer for his *wicked doings*, and you, I suppose, intend to share the plunder

with that virtuous young creature there," and the speaker laid a strong emphasis on the word "virtuous."

Mr. Steadfast left the room, hurried down stairs, and the hall-door was heard to open and close.

"Here, young woman, here 's half-a-crown for you, if you will run to the Golden Lion, and tell Mr. Praywell to come here directly."

"I 'll do no such thing," replied the servant, indignantly.

Mrs. Muckridge walked to the table, on which was the gold watch of the deceased, with a silver goblet, and turning her back to the bed, close to which knelt the weeping Selina, and stood the servant, she seized the watch and the goblet, concealed both beneath her cloak, and attempted to leave the room, — but the servant had watched her proceedings, and, placing herself before the door, she declared that Mrs. Muckridge should not depart until she had replaced the watch and goblet again on the table. At this moment, a knock at the hall-door announced the return of Mr. Steadfast. Sally, the faithful servant, hurried down to open it, admitted Mr. Steadfast and two of the police who accompanied him, and informed them of the attempt to steal the watch and goblet. They, however, found both those articles on the table, where dread of the police had induced Mrs. Muckridge to replace them; and the police informed her that unless she at once consented to leave the house quietly, they would not only expulse her by force, but arrest her on a charge of robbery. She endeavoured to make them believe that she was falsely accused, and invented an artful tale, which might, perhaps, have imposed on the police, had they not been so well acquainted with the excellent character, not only of the deceased, but of Mr. Steadfast.

"If no will is found, and I am convinced no *true one* will be forthcoming," said Mrs. Muckridge, "I shall be the rightful heir to all my cousin left behind him."

"You shall be informed when the will is to be opened," replied Mr. Steadfast; "until then, you shall not again enter this house."

Mrs. Steadfast no sooner heard of the death of her worthy neighbour, than she hastened to his house to invite Miss Strat-

ford to her own. All that kindness and sympathy could offer was showered on Selina by the excellent couple, who knew how strong was the attachment entertained for her by the departed and his wife; and how well it was merited. Both now remembered having many years before heard Mr. Vernon mention his having but one relation alive, and that being a very ill-conducted woman, whose frequent demands for money, and violent abuse when it was withheld, had given him great annoyance. This person had not been heard of for some time, and was supposed to have gone to America with an itinerant preacher, whose morals wholly unfitted him for any clerical calling.

Selina refused to leave the house, while it contained the remains of her kind friend, and in order to afford her protection, Mrs. Steadfast came to sleep there. Selina felt as if again left an orphan in a world where she had no friend; and as she looked on the face of the dead, and recalled to memory the kind smile with which it had been wont to welcome her, tears of regret for his loss, mingled with gratitude for his goodness to her, chased each other down her cheeks.

The will, which had been placed by the deceased in the hands of his lawyer, was now to be opened for instructions for his interment. Mrs. Muckridge was apprised of this, and invited to be present at the reading. The whole of the furniture and plate, and a couple of hundred pounds, the fruits of his and his worthy wife's economy, were bequeathed to Selina, and a bequest of twenty pounds to the faithful servant. Mr. Steadfast undertook to dispose of the furniture, which brought a couple of hundred pounds more, so that, when all the funeral expenses were paid, Selina found herself in possession of three hundred and fifty pounds, with some plain and simple articles of plate, endeared to her by association with the departed friends who bequeathed them, and which she determined nothing short of actual want should ever induce her to part from.

CHAPTER XXXI.

The last sad duties to the dead now over, Selina accepted the invitation of Mr. and Mrs. Steadfast to pass some time with them. It cost her many a pang to leave the house where she had received such constant kindness and affection, and as she gave a last look on the little parlour, where some of the most cheerful hours of her life had been passed, she invoked a blessing on the memory of her departed friends.

When a few days were gone by, and that her nerves had recovered from the shock occasioned by the late event, she named to Mrs. Steadfast her desire to find occupation.

"I fear that I can be of little use in procuring you a situation as governess," said that worthy woman; "I have no acquaintances among the class in which a well educated person like you ought to enter. No one thinks of referring to the wife of a simple tradesman like myself for a governess, though I am often asked to recommend a lady's maid or housekeeper. Indeed, no later than yesterday I was applied to for an attendant, to serve a very rich lady."

The thought struck Selina to offer herself for this place. The trials and the discomforts that await governesses, and which she had experienced, had so firmly convinced her that no situation could offer less chance of peace, that she was willing to try whether as *femme de chambre* she might not avoid many of the annoyances that had assailed her in her former position. She expressed her sentiments on this point to Mrs. Steadfast, who rather encouraged than checked the notion, having had occasion to know more than one instance where ladies' maids enjoyed many advantages and comforts seldom extended to governesses.

"If permitted to take my repasts in my own room, or only with a housekeeper," observed Selina, "I should have no other objection to enter service. To fit myself for it I must take lessons in dress-making, hair-dressing, and getting up laces. I shall soon acquire these essentials to my new calling, for I am quick in learning."

"But with your various accomplishments, my dear Miss Stratford, and your appearance, your manner too, it really grieves me that you should descend in life."

"It depends on oneself, dear Mrs. Steadfast, by the faithful fulfilment of one's duties, to render every situation respectable."

"You are right, I believe. You are wiser than most of your age, and I hope and trust, whatever step you decide on taking, will bring you happiness."

"You will oblige me by writing to the friend who inquired if you knew a lady's maid you could recommend, and in a fortnight, by diligent application, I trust I may be prepared for my new duties."

Mrs. Steadfast did as she was requested, and the next day brought the housekeeper in person to answer the letter. She saw Selina, professed herself charmed with her appearance and manner, declared *sotto voce* to Mrs. Steadfast that Miss Stratford was much more fit to fill the place of a lady than a lady's maid, and said she was sure that Mrs. Fraser, the lady with whom she was to live, would be greatly pleased with her. Mrs. Goodson, (so was the portly housekeeper named,) never accorded the title of mistress to any of the ladies she served, and to the one in whose establishment she now was, she would least of all think of doing so; but, with this pretension and weakness of not recognizing as masters and mistresses those whose wages she received, and whose bread she ate, she was in the main an honest and respectable woman.

"Mrs. Fraser," observed she, "is quite a young and inexperienced per-" — son, she would have said, but she corrected the *lapsus linguæ*, before more than half the word was uttered, and substituted "lady," in its place. "She is extremely well-tempered, and gentle, and her attendant will have little trouble, and may be very happy with her. With Mr. Fraser it is somewhat different — he is old, does not enjoy good health, is rather of a morose disposition, and it is clear, has not been used to young people. He has made an immense fortune in India, where he filled some very high legal post, returned home with ruined health, and committed the folly, for a folly it must surely be considered, to marry a young creature of whom he might be the grandfather. But this is not the worst part of it. Poor Mrs. Fra-

to her mind. But vain was the search to discover a cause for a conduct so unexpected, so at variance with all the previous kind treatment experienced at the hands of Mrs. Buxton. She was more than half tempted to request an interview with that lady, and to intreat an explanation; but her pride and conscious innocence revolted at taking a step that might lead Mrs. Buxton to imagine that she wished to change the resolution taken to give her her *congé*. She therefore contented herself by writing a letter, stating that she would be ready to depart the next morning; and adding, that she must request a few lines from Mrs. Buxton, to certify that since her entrance into the family she had given no cause for dissatisfaction. The abruptness of the notice to give up her situation must, she further added, plead her excuse for this request, as she wished her friends to be satisfied that no fault on her part had occasioned her sudden dismissal. Poor Selina sighed as she wrote the *s* to friend; for she remembered that she had only one on earth, on the continuance of whose regard she could count. A few hours before, she believed that she might reckon on the lasting friendship of Mrs. Buxton, and on finding a peaceful, if not a happy, home beneath her roof, for many years to come. But how short a time had it taken to destroy these illusions, and to teach her that, henceforth, she must put less faith in professions of friendship. To accept the liberal gift offered by her employer, unaccompanied by any of the kindness or cordial assurances of undiminished regard and esteem that would have given value to it, she felt would be impossible, so she enclosed the cheque in her letter to Mrs. Buxton, politely but firmly declining it.

"See," said that lady to her husband, after reading the letter, "here are two corroborative proofs that the charge against Miss Stratford is true. In the first place, she asks no explanation; which she decidedly would, if she felt conscious that she could justify herself from every accusation; and, in the second, if she did not possess an independence through the annuity, she would not have resigned so liberal a gift as fifty pounds, which, to a person relying solely on her salary for maintenance, is a little fortune."

Such were the charitable conclusions of Mrs. Buxton, to which

her husband, whether convinced of their justice, or fearful of making any defence in favour of the accused, which might again awaken the jealousy of his wife, made no reply, except to express his regret that the proffered gift had not been accepted.

"The fault is not ours, Mr. Buxton; had it been wanted it would have been kept," observed his wife. "I think," resumed she, after a little reflection, "that I may, without wounding my conscience, comply with her request, for certainly, since she has been here, I have seen nothing to find fault with. As far as my own personal experience goes, I might speak highly of her, and, unless required to explain why I parted with her, I don't think myself compelled to denounce her."

A letter, consistent with this mental reservation, was written, and given to Selina, when, after much consultation, and considerable reluctance, Mrs. Buxton was prevailed on by her husband to meet her at dinner. Again the appearance and manner of Miss Stratford produced their former influence in her favour, on the weak-minded Mrs. Buxton, who felt an embarrassment in the presence of the poor and unfriended girl she was expelling from her house without affording her a chance of justifying herself. But Mrs. Buxton, conscious of her own weakness, felt aware that, even could the most convincing proofs of Selina's innocence be given her, she had not moral courage sufficient to uphold her against the opinions of her noble neighbours. The evening passed slowly and painfully to all three. At parting, Mrs. Buxton tried again to press on Selina the gift proffered in the morning, but it was steadily rejected; and when Selina wished them farewell, both husband and wife felt a sense of shame and embarrassment from which a consciousness of her own freedom from a single act or thought that could have merited the change in their conduct towards her, kept the poor and dependant girl exempt. She had written to her friend, Mr. Vernon, to say that she would become his guest the next evening, reserving, until their meeting, the fact that she was leaving for ever the home she had so lately thought would be her permanent one for years to come. The whole conduct of Mr. and Mrs. Buxton was so inexplicable to her, that she could not attempt to explain it; but she well knew that the confidence in her, enter-

ser, for poor she is, notwithstanding all the gold he lavishes on her, has a mother and sisters in very bad circumstances. She believed, when she married a gentleman of such a disproportionate age, that she might offer a home to her mother and two sisters, on whom she dotes, or at all events, that he would enable her to provide comfortably for them, and allow her to see them constantly. I believe he led her to think all this, poor young creature, and it was a great shame for him so to impose on her, but when they returned after the honeymoon, he soon let her see the cloven foot. He has given no provision, — so I hear from the valet, — to the mother and her two daughters, who have not enough to enable them, even by pinching themselves of all solid comforts, to keep up an appearance of decency. They are very good persons, and have seen better days, for the father of Mrs. Fraser was a colonel in the army, and a gentleman of good family, and the mother was the daughter of a Dean Everfield, who would have been a bishop if he had lived. So, you see, they are every way respectable."

Such was the extent of the housekeeper's information, who, being of a very communicative disposition, seldom neglected any opportunity of acquiring a knowledge of the affairs of her employers, and still more seldom missed any occasion of making them known to others.

We must now make our readers acquainted with the remainder of the history of Mrs. Fraser. Her father's regiment had been sent to India, but he, dreading the effect of the climate for his wife and young children, or, probably, not having the means to defray the heavy expense consequent on such a voyage, left them in England. In India he formed the acquaintance of Mr. Fraser, to whom he often spoke of his wife and children at home. After some years, and just as the poor colonel's regiment was to return to England, and he all joy at the prospect of being restored to his wife and children, he died suddenly, leaving little beside the small pension to which an officer's widow is entitled. When, some three or four years after, Mr. Fraser came home from India, he sought out the widow of his friend. He found that all his own relations had died, except some remote ones in Scotland, who

were poor, and could do him no credit. Friends and acquaintances he had none, save those he had made in India, and who, like himself, had returned to enjoy in England the wealth accumulated there. He became attracted by the beauty of Mrs. Herbert's eldest daughter, and held out hopes that if this poor young creature would bestow her hand on him, he would not only place her in affluence, but provide handsomely for her mother and sisters. This last hope was the inducement that conquered the natural dislike of the poor girl to wed a man old enough to be her grandfather, and of plain appearance and disagreeable manners. Fondly attached to her mother and sisters, and well aware, for she had shared them, of the privations they had to undergo, she determined to secure their comfort by the sacrifice of her own happiness, and wedded Mr. Fraser. Mrs. Herbert's poverty, and consequent seclusion, had broken off nearly all intercourse with former friends and acquaintances, so she had no one to consult on the marriage of her daughter, or to see that a proper settlement was made on her. To stipulate on any allowance to herself, though she was led to believe that she was to receive one, would, in her mind, be like bartering her child for gold; so she never hinted at it, although the prospect of seeing her two younger daughters placed in comfort was a great inducement to her beautiful Amy's wedding a disagreeable old man. The nuptials were celebrated; the blooming bride, and yellow, withered bridegroom set off on a tour, without his making even the customary gifts to the two youthful bridesmaids, the Misses Herbert, or offering any assistance to their poor mother. The bride thought that, at the parting moment, a bank note of a large amount would be stipped into the hand of her weeping mother, and this conviction cheered her when depressed by contemplating the yellow, wrinkled face reflected in the front glass of the chariot, every glance at which made her shudder.

The temper of Mr. Fraser, never good, was considerably ruffled on this occasion by having heard an Irish apple-woman, whose stall was near Mrs. Herbert's humble abode at Brompton, axclaim, as he handed his bride into the carriage, "Ah! there goes a beautiful rosebud tied to a faded old orange-lily, and more 's the pity."

Mrs. Herbert grew pale when she remembered how large a portion of the sum meant to support her and her two daughters for the next half year, had been spent in providing a few indispensable articles of clothing for the bride. Mr. Fraser had sent no *trousseau*, no *corbeille*, well as he knew the inability of Mrs. Herbert to provide either, and she was too delicate to hint a word on the subject. She had, therefore, bought some linen, and a few dresses, more suitable to the position her daughter was henceforth to fill than in accordance with her own very limited means; and now she found herself much worse off than ever, and trembled as she looked on her weeping girls, who could not, for some hours, be consoled when they saw the vacant place of that dear and gentle sister, who had never before quitted them. The alarmed mother recalled to mind how, when she had ventured to recommend a maid for her daughter, Mr. Fraser desired her not to trouble herself, for he had provided one, who would meet his wife at the place they were to stop at for the night the day they should leave Town. She thought, at the moment, that the arrangement was a strange and ungracious one; but it had occurred to her that, probably, Mr. Fraser might not wish the servant of his wife to see the humble abode whence he took her, and that, until she and her daughters were placed by him in one more consonant to the position her married daughter was to hold, he wished to avoid any persons of his establishment coming to the little cottage at Brompton. But when day after day passed without bringing her a line from her child, that child of whose attachment she could not, for a moment, entertain a doubt, and of whose whereabouts she would have remained in total ignorance, had not the "Morning Post" announced the fact that the *millionnaire* Mr. Fraser and his lovely bride were arrived at Cheltenham — that conservatory for returned Indians with diseased livers. She instantly wrote a letter to Mrs. Fraser, and waited, in an agony of suspense, for an answer. But she waited in vain; and then she bethought herself of writing to Mr. Fraser. But even the pain of suspense was less bitter to be borne than the fearful truth that broke on her mind when his answer arrived. The following lines were the whole contents of the letter: —

"Madam, — Mrs. Fraser did not receive your favour, for at her age I think it incumbent on me to open and read all letters addressed to her, consequently yours came to my hands; and I will be plain with you, — I have deemed it expedient that she should not see it. When I married your daughter, and relieved you from the expense of her board, lodging, and clothing, which, in your confined circumstances, must be a great saving, I never contemplated encumbering myself with you, or your two daughters. The position which my wife will fill is so widely diffent to yours, that an intercourse between you could only bring painful comparisons to the minds of both parties. This is to be avoided, more especially as Mrs. Fraser's undue sensibility, foolishly, I must say, allowed by you to become morbid, would, if encouraged, either by personal intercourse or correspondence, be likely to impair her health, or, at all events, interfere with my comfort.

"I remain, Madam, your obedient Servant,

"JAMES FRASER."

The grief of the mother and sisters at finding themselves denied the happiness of seeing her so dear to them, may easily be imagined. The separation tortured them, and well did they know the effect it would produce on the unfortunate young creature, who had, they felt convinced, formed this ill-assorted union, more with a view to the advantages *they* might derive from it, than from any ambitious wishes of her own. *They* could talk of the dear absent one, could dwell on her perfections, and they were manifold, and there was some faint consolation even in this. But she — she had no one to whom she could speak of that loved, though humble, home; of that dear and affectionate mother, and those beloved sisters, whom it was agony to leave, even when cheered by the delusive hope of beholding them again in a few weeks. What a solitude of the heart must her's be, with a harsh and stern old man, as they now, too late, discovered Mr. Fraser to be; and their own grief was absorbed in pity and sympathy for her's.

Such was the state of affairs in the mansion in which Selina Stratford was to make her *début* in the humble position of *Femme de Chambre*. To serve so gentle and unfortunate a being as Mrs.

Fraser was represented to be, was more consonant with her wishes than an entrance into the family of a lady of fashion; and when, the following day, she presented herself in Grosvenor-square, and was admitted to the presence of the youthful wife, her touching beauty, the pensive expression of her countenance, and the low, sweet sound of her voice, excited the liveliest interest in the breast of Selina. Mr. Fraser was present at the interview, and his appearance fully justified the prejudice Selina had imbibed against him. He examined her attentively, demanded her age, family, and where she had previously served. When told she had never been a *femme de chambre* before, he expressed his satisfaction, saying that he peculiarly wished to have a person who had not held the situation in any other family, although he expected her to be able to fulfil the functions. "Mrs. Fraser is so very young and inexperienced," added the stern old man, "that you will refer to me before you obey any of her orders that are at all out of the ordinary routine, by which I mean, you are never to deliver or receive letters or notes, to or from her. You are never to admit visitors to her dressing-room, however nearly related to her they may be, or to convey messages."

Selina stole a glance at the fair young creature before her, whose face, one moment covered with blushes, was the next as pale as marble. Tears trembled in her downcast eyes, and the movement of the white drapery that covered her delicate bust revealed the agitation of the heart that throbbed beneath it.

Mr. Fraser was a singularly plain man. Age had left its searing marks on a low and retreating forehead, crossed by deep lines, eyes dim, and bordered by lids of a crimson hue, which rendered the dingy yellow tint of the whole face still more striking by the contrast, reminding one of a yellow tulip, with a few streaks of red on it. A black wig, of so juvenile a fashion as to represent the hair of a dandy of twenty, increased the disagreeable effect produced by the whole countenance; and the extreme foppishness of his dress attracted more attention to the gaunt and ill-formed figure, whose defects it by no means concealed. False whiskers, attached to the wig, and adhering to the yellow cheeks through the medium of gum, and teeth, "few and far between," revealed

whenever their owner spoke, completed as revolting a face as ever Selina looked upon. To glance from this disagreeable object to the fair creature who bore his name, ay, and had to bear with it the frequent ebullitions of a temper never good, but now soured by age, ill health, and evil passions, was quite sufficient to make her feel disgust for one, and deep pity for the other.

Mrs. Fraser was remarkably beautiful. Faultless in features, and with a fairness of complexion seldom seen, hair dark as the raven's wing, and eyes of a deep blue, with a charming mouth and teeth, it was impossible to see a more lovely creature. Her figure was tall and slender, yet not deficient in that roundness of *contour* which gives feminine beauty its finishing touch, and her feet and hands were of extreme delicacy.

"And what situation have you hitherto held?" demanded Mr. Fraser, with the air of an inquisitor.

"That of a nursery governess," replied Selina, wishing to conceal that she was capable of being a governess to young people more advanced in years, lest the discovery might militate against her being engaged in so subordinate a one as that for which she now offered herself.

"A nursery governess," repeated he, "so much the better, for you can serve as a sort of companion to Mrs. Fraser, as well as lady's maid, and this will be agreeable to me when I am forced to absent myself from home, as I have a peculiar objection to her being left alone."

Again Mrs. Fraser's cheeks became suffused with blushes, and tears filled her eyes; but if either of these emotions were noticed by her unfeeling husband, he said or did nothing to denote the slightest contrition for having occasioned these symptoms of discomposure.

Selina prepared to depart, and her movement recalled Mr. Fraser from the moody state of abstraction into which he seemed to have fallen for the last few minutes. "We have not as yet spoken of wages," said he, and the word grated harshly on the ear of Selina, "what do you demand?"

"Forty pounds a-year."

"Forty pounds! that is a very large sum. I should have

thought twenty-five pounds a-year quite sufficient. The present maid of Mrs. Fraser has only that sum."

"For a person who is to act as companion as well as lady's maid, a less sum than the one I have named, Sir, would not enable me to make a suitable appearance. I must also premise that I cannot consent to take my meals with the servants; with the housekeeper I have no objection, but it would not suit me to dine in the servants' hall."

"Humph," said Mr. Fraser; "well, well, this won't make any great difference — you may have your meals served in your own room. Of course your tea, sugar, and washing are included in the 40*l*., and your beer money too."

"Yes, Sir," replied Selina, anxious to get over this part of the affair, and heartily disgusted with the sordidness of the *millionnaire*.

The situation was so very untempting, that she was much disposed at once to decline it; but the pensive countenance of the fair young wife appealed so strongly to her sympathy, that her desire to soothe, if not to ameliorate her position, triumphed over the distaste she had conceived against becoming a dependent on the gloomy and irascible Mr. Fraser. The countenance of his poor wife, too, had no inconsiderable influence on the decision of Selina. Her mild expression, and lady-like demeanour, so different from the pert self-sufficiency, or servile submission appertaining to the general class of *suivantes*, had greatly impressed Mrs. Fraser in her favour; the purity of her diction, the agreeable tone of her voice, and her personal attractions also, had their due weight in winning the good will of the youthful and unhappy wife. There is, whatever some persons may assert to the contrary, a sympathy, a sort of freemasonry in beauty, and particularly in that species of it which consists in an expression of goodness, that draws those who possess it towards each other. Both women, in the present instance, were conscious of this magnetic effects, and felt predisposed to become friends; and when Selina closed her agreement with Mr. Fraser, his wife longed to tell her how much gratified she felt by the arrangement. Mrs. Buxton was to be written to, and Mrs. Steadfast was to be seen, relative to the

character of Miss Stratford, and if the result proved satisfactory, Selina was to enter her new position.

She withdrew, and left Mrs. Fraser most desirous that she should soon return.

"She is too pretty, but that can't be helped," soliloquized Mr. Fraser, "and may after all prove advantageous. Handsome women are always jealous of each other, and envy in this case will be added to that passion; for how can this very good-looking girl see the riches and splendour that surround my wife without being envious? This will render her a willing spy over Amy, and make her carefully obey my instructions."

So reasoned the obtuse nabob, and so reason many of his sex, who believe they comprehend women, because they judge by a few of the unworthy specimens of the sex that may have fallen in their way, and who, thinking that the beauty of other women detracts from their own, are disposed to dislike and malign them.

In due time the answer arrived from Mrs. Buxton, who, haunted by remorse at having believed aught to the prejudice of Selina, had, ever since the proofs of her innocence had been furnished, longed for an apportunity to make atonement to her, and gladly seized this one. Every eulogium that good feeling could convey, was lavished on Miss Stratford by the good-natured but weak-minded woman, who missed her society every day, yet had not moral courage sufficient to entreat her return, lest such a measure might be offensive to her noble neighbours. Mrs. Steadfast gave an equally high character of Miss Stratford, and Mr. Fraser, being now fully satisfied of her merits, wrote to request she would enter his establishment as soon as possible. The arrangements for her reception far surpassed her expectations. They were not only comfortable, but even elegant, for Mr. Fraser, reasoning like a selfish and cunning man, determined, by making Selina's position as comfortable as possible, to attach her to it, and render her willing to do all his behests rather than risk losing it.

CHAPTER XXXII.

When left alone with her gentle mistress, her timidity and embarrassment pained, while they filled with pity, the heart of Selina. Like a beautiful bird in a gilded cage, pining for freedom, and loathing its gorgeous prison, sate this fair young creature, insensible to the splendour around her, or only remembering it as the badge of the slavery which gladly would she escape from. From the first moment of her entering the house, Mrs. Fraser treated Selina not as a dependent or inferior, but as an equal, or rather as a friend. She, with the intuitive quickness of her sex, at once perceived that Selina was more suited to be her companion than servant. When Selina offered to dress her beautiful hair, the fair Amy said, "I really feel ashamed to allow you, Miss Stratford, to perform any menial service for me. You shall arrange my hair, if you, in return, will permit me to dress yours."

This artless delicacy pleased Selina, who could so well appreciate it; but with a gentle firmness, acquired by the knowledge of the world gained within the last year or two, she taught Mrs. Fraser to comprehend that the relative positions of mistress and *femme de chambre* must not be lost sight of between them. When the duties of the toilette were over, Mrs. Fraser would entreat her to read aloud to her, to play and sing to her, or to place her easel, or embroidery-frame, near to her own, and converse while they drew or worked. Often would deep sighs burst from the heart of this young creature, and tears drop from her eyes; and she would cast an imploring look at Selina, which said, as plain as ever glance spoke, "Why don't you ask me the cause of my sighs and tears?"

But Selina, though most anxious to contribute to the comfort of her amiable mistress, was by no means desirous to possess her confidence, fearful that she might, in that case, be expected to be made the medium of communication between her and those dear relatives, whose cruel separation from her caused, she felt assured, the emotions she so frequently witnessed. It was no selfish dread of losing her position, that influenced Selina to

avoid eliciting or encouraging the confidence of Mrs. Fraser feared that that amiable young person's already painful sitt would be rendered still more so, by her harsh and stern hus should he discover, that, in spite of his interdiction, sh held any communication with her mother and sisters, an dread weighed on her mind, and induced her to endeavo change the subject whenever, as was frequently the case, Fraser was leading to it. Painful was it to Selina to witne expression of keen disappointment that clouded the fair f her gentle mistress on these occasions; yet when, as w custom, Mr. Fraser entered the dressing-room abruptly, w even knocking at the door, and examined the countenances wife and herself, as if he suspected they were carrying on secret plot, she rejoiced that *she* could meet his searching undismayed, and that his scrutiny all over the chamber, in to discover something to justify his suspicions, was fru The most jealous husband could not betray more anxiety or nuity to detect some clue to a love affair, by which his honou peace would be compromised, than did this self-torment find out whether his innocent and unhappy wife kept up any munication with her family. When her cheek grew pale, ar eyes betrayed that sleep was a stranger to them, he would se for the most eminent physician, to whom he would state his for her health, which he declared was dearer to him thar and, for the next three or four days, he would watch her tenance with all the trembling dread with which a fond m examines that of her only child. "There must be some dang malady preying on her," would he say, in answer to the cian's assertion, that *he* saw only a delicacy of structure, req care, and an extreme sensibility.

"Avoidance of exposure to the night air, and a peculiar tion to preserve the young lady from all causes of mental ar are all that are required; and with these your daughter w well," would every new doctor consulted declare; for, dis fied with each, a fresh one was called in every time that his were excited. Perhaps his anger, at having his youthfu *always* mistaken for his daughter, had something to do in h

variably consulting a new physician, and as each repeated nearly the same words, he had no confidence in any of them. "What cause for anxiety *can* she have?" would he say to the medical adviser. "I have the means, and the desire, to gratify the most extravagant wishes. Could she eat gold she might have it; and her jewels surpass those of the proudest of our aristocracy."

"Riches do not always bestow happiness, Sir," would be the reply. "Mrs. Fraser is very young; perhaps the want of companions of her own age may have engendered the melancholy which her countenance reveals."

"But she has a companion, a youthful one, too, who plays and sings to her, who, in short, devotes herself wholly to her amusement."

"A hired one, probably."

"Yes; but a very accomplished one, and very gentle and sweet-tempered, as my wife tells me."

"With so plain, so aged, and so stern a husband as you," thought the physician, "it can hardly be wondered at, that the poor young creature is low-spirited. How many have I seen fade, droop, and die, under similar circumstances!"

But though each of the medical men called in had formed the same opinion, none had given utterance to this last reflection; and Mr. Fraser was left to dwell on the probable cause of his wife's altered looks, and constant sadness, namely his own harsh conduct, in having torn asunder those ties with which her peace, nay, her very life was bound up. But although his conscience frequently whispered this cause, and that he could not silence its murmurs, he was obstinately bent on not following its dictates — no, not even to see the roses of health bloom on her cheek again, and her eyes resume their lustre, would he consent to her renewing her intercourse with her family. Much as he liked her — and he did love her as much as it was in his selfish nature to love aught save self, her sweetness of temper and gentleness having rivetted the affection her beauty had excited, — he would have preferred seeing her sink into a premature grave, rather than behold her lavishing on her mother and sisters that tenderness, the demonstrations of which, previous to his marriage, had fre-

quently awakened his jealousy and envy; and which he felt never would be showered on himself.

In vain did he bestow on her the most costly gifts, procure for her delicate appetite the rarest dainties, and fill her splendid conservatory with the choicest flowers — all these proofs of attention were received with a faint smile and a few gracious words, but it was evident they afforded her no pleasure. Then would he accuse her of ingratitude, declare that half the fine things he had heaped on her would have rendered any reasonable woman in the world happy, and that he was the most unfortunate man on earth, in having a wife whom all his exertions could not make even cheerful. Sometimes his timid victim would endeavour to lead to the forbidden subject of what could restore her cheerfulness; though happiness, she felt, with him, would be out of the question, for a personal distaste, imbibed from the very commencement of their acquaintance, and greatly strengthened by his cruelty in separating her from those dear ones for whose sakes she had sacrificed herself, rendered his presence irksome to her, and even his attentions odious. Nevertheless, a sense of the respect due to a husband, and to one, too, old enough to be her grandfather, so far influenced her manner, that, although loathing his person, and shrinking with disgust from even an approach to familiarity on his part, she invariably treated him with gentleness and deference. The only relief she experienced from the sadness that was now becoming habitual to her, was, when he was absent from home; then would she retire to her dressing-room or boudoir, and, *tête-à-tête* with Selina, engaged in reading or conversing, forget for a brief time her unhappiness. As she got to know Selina better, her regard for her rapidly increased; and as Selina discovered the sweetness of temper, innocence, and candour of her youthful mistress's character, her affection and esteem for her augmented. Mrs. Fraser would question her on the events of her life, not from a motive of idle curiosity, but from a real interest in her; and Selina would disclose to her passages in her short but troubled life, which greatly touched the feelings of the excellent young creature.

"You were too young to be sensible of a mother's love, to

have missed her tender care," would Mrs. Fraser reply; "you think of her as blessed in a better world, where the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest; but if you knew the anguish of being separated from the dearest, fondest mother that ever lived, every recollection of whom is mingled with some mark of tenderness, some proof of self-abnegation, to be found only in a mother's heart, how would you pity me; but to know that she is within a distance that might be passed in an hour, that in an hour I might be clasped to that dear heart whence I drew my nurture when an infant, on which my head was so often pillowed to sleep, yet to be as wholly severed from her, as if seas rolled between us; to be denied even the comfort of hearing from her, or of writing to her, oh! this indeed is misery;" and tears would stop her utterance. Then would she resume: "To be separated from sisters, dear, fond sisters, who shared every thought, who lightened, by sharing, every care; to advance whose interests, as well as to secure comfort for a dear mother, too long deprived of it, the sacrifice of all one's own feelings was made, and to find it made in vain! Oh, how hard is it to bear! and can it be wondered at that health sinks under such trials? I would have been so grateful, too, for any kindness shown to those so dear to me. I would conquer the distaste that, in spite of every effort to resist it, daily increases towards him. I have vowed at the altar to love, honour, and obey — gratitude would have supplied the place of a more tender sentiment; yes, I would have been his servant, his slave, anything, to prove my gratitude, my devotion to him."

Frequently would Mr. Fraser send for Selina, and question her: "Your mistress," would he say, "appeared agitated yesterday, when I entered the dressing-room; what was the cause?"

"Mrs. Fraser's health and spirits suffer, I think, Sir, from the seclusion in which she lives."

"Do you think that occasional visits to the theatres would amuse her?"

"No, Sir. I do not believe she likes public amusements."

"Then what do you think is the cause of her low spirits? With all that wealth can purchase, what can she want?"

"If I may take the liberty of telling you my opinion, Sir, I should say she pines for an intercourse with her relations."

"Which she shall never have," interrupted Mr. Fraser; "no, sooner would I behold her die, than yield to her wishes on this point. Yes, sooner would I see her borne to her grave, although she is the sole object on earth dear to me, than witness the demonstrations of her affection lavished on those I hate; yes, on those I abhor, because they have engrossed all her tenderness."

Then, as if angry with himself for having revealed his hardness of heart, he would tell Selina to be gone, and menace her with instant dismissal if she ever betrayed a word he said to her to her mistress. At other times he would offer her bribes, if she would undertake to reason with Mrs. Fraser, and to tell her that when women married they seldom saw much of their mothers or sisters after; that it was childishness and folly to pine at being separated from them; and that hundreds of ladies, young, beautiful, and of high birth, would deem themselves happy to be his wife, and possess the treasures he had lavished on her.

When Selina pleaded, that it would be vain to address such arguments to one whose affections were so deeply engaged, he would fly into a rage, and dismiss her from his presence, saying, she was almost as foolish as her mistress.

Nevertheless, blind, obstinate, and hard-hearted as was this selfish old man, he had conceived a good opinion of Selina, and had so much more confidence in her than in any other person, that he would have been sorry to see her leave his house.

Day by day the cheek of Mrs. Fraser became paler, her form more attenuated, and her langour increased. She was now reduced to a state of such weakness as to be unable to leave her sofa; and Selina, who marked with deep regret the progress of her decline, watched over her with unceasing care.

The prolonged illness of the wife of the *millionnaire*, — a lady, too, whose beauty, no less than whose splendid equipages and magnificent diamonds, had been the means of drawing public attention to the old nabob as well as to herself, could not long be kept a secret. The newspapers announced the fact, in the set *phrases* of regret generally employed on similar occasions; and

the door of Mr. Fraser was daily besieged by inquirers after the health of the invalid. The physicians called in had various consultations. There was a frequent pulling out of gold watches; sundry sapient shakes of the head, and differences of opinion, not only as to the malady, its cause, seat, probable duration, and termination, but also as to the treatment to be pursued; each inclining to some pet system of his own, yet all agreeing on one point, namely, that if Mrs. Fraser did not get better, she must get worse — a fact that even the most ignorant of her domestics might have discovered without a medical consultation.

The fatigue to which Selina was exposed, seldom leaving the chamber of her mistress, and sitting up night after night by her bedside; had such an effect on her own health, that one of the doctors, having noticed her altered looks, desired that a nurse should be called in to relieve her, by taking her place at night by the pillow of their patient. This doctor, a humane and worthy man, had become greatly interested in the state of Mrs. Fraser; and her husband, tortured by the dread of losing her, felt more disposed to adopt his advice than that of any of the other physicians. When, therefore, Doctor Percy insisted on the necessity of a nurse being called in, and stated that he knew one whom he could recommend as an intelligent and trustworthy person, Mr. Fraser gave permission to have her sent, and a few hours after she made her appearance. Selina was alone present when she entered, and was instantly struck by the trepidation evident in her manner. Her hand shook, her lips trembled, and there was an agitation in her whole manner, in spite of every effort to conceal it, that arrested Selina's attention. "You seem ill," whispered she.

"No, Madam, only the effect of having ascended the stairs too rapidly. The palpitation will subside in a moment."

Mrs. Fraser was asleep, and often murmured the names of her mother and sisters. Each time that she did so, the nurse trembled, and turned pale as death, and Selina observed that she turned away her head, and stealthily applied her handkerchief to her eyes. There was a nervousness in all her movements, a suppressed agitation, that it was evident she sought to subdue and conceal, but which, nevertheless, manifested itself in various ways. When

Mr. Fraser entered the sick chamber the nurse seemed to make a strong effort to recover her self-control. Although the curtains were drawn, and only a very feeble light admitted in the room, she avoided, as much as possible, coming near him. "You are the nurse sent by Dr. Percy?" said he, eyeing her suspiciously.

"Yes, Sir," was the reply, accompanied by a respectful curtsey.

Selina noticed that these two monosyllables were uttered by the nurse in a totally different tone of voice to that in which she had spoken to her. The bearing, and manner, too, of the nurse were different. Previous to Mr. Fraser's entrance, although agitated, there was an unmistakable air and demeanour of a gentlewoman about the woman, while now she appeared to affect the air and manner of the generality of persons of her class.

"Have you had much experience in your calling?" inquired Mr. Fraser.

"Yes, Sir, a good deal; and Dr. Percy halways *be's* so good as to recommend me, in cases where he is very hanxious about his patient."

Mr. Fraser drew back the curtain to look on the sleeper, the nurse standing behind him; and Selina saw the woman shudder, and turn pale as death, as she caught a view of the invalid. She seemed ready to sink to the earth, for a moment; but when Mr. Fraser let the curtain fall, and turned to speak to her, she had conquered her feelings, and assumed a look of stolid indifference.

"Don't allow any one to enter this room, except the doctors and Miss Stratford," said Mr. Fraser; "and remember that, when Miss Stratford is out of the room, you must never allow a note, nor a message, to be delivered to Mrs. Fraser, nor from her, under penalty of my severest displeasure."

"I will be sure to hattend to your horders, Sir," was the answer, accompanied by another low curtsey; and he left the room.

No sooner had he disappeared, than the nurse sank into a chair, gasping for breath, and trembling violently. Selina poured her out a glass of water, and raised it to her lips, and when a portion of it had been swallowed, the nurse seemed revived, and gave her an eloquent glance of gratitude, with a few whispered words of

thanks, uttered in such correct phraseology, and so wholly free from the vulgar addition and aspiration of the letter *h*, as to convince her that, when speaking to Mr. Fraser, the nurse had not spoken in her natural voice or manner. Selina also observed, that, although she was a woman of much more than ordinary obesity, her movements were so light, that they could hardly be heard. Her hands, too, were wonderfully small, as compared to the large figure to which they appertained, and the spectacles she wore could not prevent Selina from noticing that her eyes did not look as if they required their aid.

When Mrs. Fraser awoke, Selina informed her that the nurse, recommended by Dr. Percy, was present.

"I am glad," replied she, "for you, dear Miss Stratford, may now have a night's rest, of which I am sure you stand greatly in need. Nurse, be so good as to give me a little barley-water."

Selina had kept her eye on the nurse while Mrs. Fraser spoke, and observed that she was again greatly agitated. It was, however, evident that the feelings under which she now was influenced were of a different kind to the former ones; for tears rushed to her eyes, and she was compelled to remove her spectacles to wipe them off, before she could pour out the barley-water, and present it to the invalid.

Mrs. Fraser looked at her for a moment, took the glass from her hand, and said, "You tremble. Are you ill?"

"No, Madam, thank you, I am only a little flurried, for the moment, at coming into a strange place."

The same voice was assumed in speaking to Mrs. Fraser, as when answering her husband's questions, but this time the letter *h* was omitted to be added to the words to which it had previously been joined.

"Poor woman, she is so large, that moving about must indeed flurry her," observed Mrs. Fraser, in French, to Selina. "Arrange my pillow, nurse, it is not comfortable," said Mrs. Fraser.

Selina, seeing that the nurse's agitation still continued, approached the bed to arrange the pillow.

"No, dear, good Selina, you must let nurse do it, that I

may get accustomed to her mode of managing it, otherwise I shall miss you too much when you are taking your needful rest."

"Indeed I do not require more rest, dear Madam," replied Selina, "and do not like to resign my post."

"But I must not grow so selfish as to allow you to injure your health through your anxiety to save mine."

The nurse cast a look so full of gratitude towards Selina, that the latter became more convinced than ever that the person before her took no common interest in the invalid; and a gleam of *who* she might possibly be flashed through her mind. The nurse now approached the bed, raised Mrs. Fraser gently in her arms, supported her on her left, while with her right she moved the pillows, and smoothed them, and then placed the invalid in an easy posture.

"Thanks, good nurse, how comfortable you have made me! You must not be jealous, dear Selina, but I really never have had my pillows so nicely arranged, or felt myself so tenderly, so gently moved in my bed, since my own darling mother used to smoothe them, and move me when I was ill."

The nurse trembled so violently, that Mrs. Fraser, although she was concealed from her by the curtain, became conscious of her emotion. "Do, Selina, ring the bell, and order a glass of wine for nurse; she requires it, I am quite sure, she is so very nervous."

"If you will permit me to leave the room for a few minutes, I shall quite recover, Madam," said the nurse, who then quickly glided away, opening and closing the door so softly as scarcely to be heard.

"It is very strange, Selina, but I who dislike fat and flaxen-haired people, and persons who wear spectacles, all which prejudices I know to be very foolish, cannot help feeling drawn towards this strange nurse, who has all these imperfections. There is something nice in the sound of her voice, which recalls some one very dear to me to my mind; and had I closed my eyes, or not looked at her, I could have fancied that I was resting on my darling mother's arm, when she supported me. Yes, I feel *I shall like* her, though she does look very disagreeable, with

her profusion of flaxen curls, her spectacles, and her great unwieldy form."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE reflections of Mrs. Fraser made so strong an impression on Selina, that they almost confirmed the suspicions she had previously formed, that the nurse was other than what she assumed to be. What if she were actually the mother of Mrs. Fraser, and had sought access to her child by the only means in her power, and had disguised herself to avoid detection? Yes, it must be so. How else could her agitation, her altered voice and manner when speaking to Mr. Fraser, and her tears, be accounted for? Selina felt her heart filled with pity for the mother, thus compelled to travesty herself, and act the part of a mercenary nurse to her own child, at the risk that if a detection took place, she would be expulsed with insult from the house, by the hard-hearted and relentless tyrant, who, by keeping her daughter from her and her sisters, had reduced her to the helpless state in which she was now placed. She determined to do all in her power to render the position of Mrs. Herbert as little painful as possible, by screening her from the watchful scrutiny of Mr. Fraser, and attending to her comforts.

"Illness is apt, by weakening the nerves, to engender many strange fancies," observed Mrs. Fraser, after a long silence; "do you know, Selina, that when I felt the quick pulsations of the nurse's heart, and the gentle touches of her smooth soft hand, I was so reminded of my mother, that tears came into my eyes, and I looked in her face in search of a likeness. But I believe it is not an unusual thing, when all one's thoughts are filled by one object, to look for a resemblance; nay more, to fancy one has found it, in another's face. When I used to drive in the streets when I came back after my marriage, I used to gaze at every woman accompanied by two nice-looking girls I saw, thinking that they might be my dear mother and sisters, and I used to fancy I traced resemblances to them. Now there is positively something about the mouth and teeth of this nurse, that greatly

reminds me of my darling mother's; I wish she had raven-black hair, and not those flaxen locks, and then the likeness would be stronger. My mother is very slight, and has such a *distingué* air, and then her face is very fair and delicate, while nurse's is coarse and red; but I am a fool, am I not, Selina, to indulge in such fancies?"

As the evening wore away, the nurse became more composed. She was evidently either of a very taciturn nature, a peculiarity seldom to be met with in persons of her profession, or else she was fearful of her voice being recognised, and Selina was disposed to accept the latter hypothesis. She never spoke but when addressed, and then replied as briefly as possible. Yet there were moments when her countenance lighted up, and words seemed hovering on her lips; but she checked them, and remained absorbed in thought, her eyes constantly fixed on the bed, and her ear catching every sound that proceeded from it. Did the invalid betray the slightest symptom of restlessness, the nurse was instantly by her bedside, ready to move her, and smoothe her pillow; and never did she fulfil these duties of her calling without Mrs. Fraser's expressing her satisfaction at the mode in which it was done, as also remarking how much it reminded her of her mother. Such allusions never failed to produce a visible effect on the nurse, notwithstanding her endeavours to conceal it.

It had been agreed, that Selina was to fill the place of nurse during the day, while the latter slept; and during the night nurse was to remain with the invalid. This arrangement appeared to satisfy Mrs. Norman, (so was the nurse named;) and Selina could not help thinking that her satisfaction was caused by this arrangement keeping her out of sight of Mr. Fraser, whose presence always flurried and alarmed her. When Doctor Percy paid his daily visits, he several times expressed a desire to see the nurse; but, when told by Selina that she was asleep, he forbore to urge it. One night Selina heard, or fancied she heard, a noise in the chamber of Mrs. Fraser, which was at no great distance *from* her own, and fearful that some change for the worse had occurred, she arose, and with stealthy steps entered it. Mrs.

Norman was on her knees, praying by the bedside, tears streaming down her cheeks, and an expression of such acute anguish on her countenance — that countenance now more exposed by the spectacles having been removed, that scarcely a doubt of the justice of her suspicions remained in the mind of Selina. Mrs. Norman started in evident alarm, the moment she became sensible of the entrance of some person in the room. She arose from her kneeling posture, snatched up her spectacles, and hastily put them on. When, however, she saw that the intruder was Selina, her alarm seemed to diminish, and she gradually recovered her self-possession. In a few minutes after Selina's entrance, Mrs. Fraser sighed heavily, and murmured audibly, "Mother, dear, dear mother, come to me!"

The nurse started from her chair, flew, rather than ran, to the bedside, opened the curtain, and bent over the sleeper, who, awakened by the movement, yet still not sufficiently so to have resumed consciousness, flung her arms around the neck of Mrs. Norman, pressed her passionately to her breast, exclaiming, "Mother, darling mother, you are come to me at last."

Quite overcome by this surprise, the nurse sank fainting on the bed. Selina ran to her assistance, and Mrs. Fraser, now perfectly awake, sat up, and looked anxiously at the poor woman, who, utterly insensible, gave no symptom of life, save a slight pulsation of the heart. Selina bathed her temples with cold water; and, to be enabled to do it more effectually, removed the mass of light curls that covered her brow. In the operation the false hair fell off, as well as the cap, and the natural hair, of a shining black, besprent with grey, stood revealed.

"My mother! oh, my dear, dear mother!" exclaimed Mrs. Fraser, "my heart told me it was you!" and, bursting into a passionate fit of tears, she fondly embraced her parent.

"Fly, fly to the door, Selina," said she, "and lock it securely. We shall be lost, should Mr. Fraser discover that she is here."

The injunction was rapidly performed; and now Selina, anxious to relieve Mrs. Herbert, opened her dress and unlaced her corset, when she found that, instead of the very large woman

the pretended nurse had appeared to be, she was, in reality, a slight person enveloped in several wadded dresses. The exertions of Selina to restore the suspended animation of Mrs. Herbert, were not crowned with success for half an hour. She then opened her eyes, looked around, as if awaking from a dream, when meeting the love-beaming eyes of her daughter, filled with tears of affection, fixed on her face, she became conscious of what was passing around her.

It would be difficult, if not impossible, to describe the scene that ensued. Pressed in each other's arms, the mother and daughter mingled their tears and embraces, looked in each other's faces again and again, as if they would note the ravages made by sorrow at their separation.

"My child, my precious child, how you are changed since I parted from you, blooming in health!" said Mrs. Herbert, in accents so full of sadness, that they went right to the hearts of her hearers; Selina being scarcely less moved than Mrs. Fraser.

"And you, my dear, my blessed mother, how pale, how thin you have grown! There were no white locks amid the dark ones I used to be so proud of when I left you!" and the daughter pressed the dishevelled tresses of her mother to her lips. "But we will part no more, dearest mother. You will take me to my old home, to my sisters, will you not? Oh, I have been so wretched without you and them, that I prayed for death!"

How did the tears flow down the pale cheeks of Mrs. Herbert, as she listened to the artless words of her child, and felt her own helplessness to comply with the touching appeal addressed to her!

"You do not answer me, dearest mother! Why do you not speak; why not promise that you will take me with you, to dwell for evermore in my old, my happy home? You know not how I hate all the splendour that surrounds me. It only reminds me how dearly it has been purchased — purchased by our separation!"

The agony of the mother is not to be described, while revealing to her innocent daughter, a creature wholly ignorant of the world *and its laws*, that the day, the fatal day that saw her bestow he

hand on Mr. Fraser, deprived her parent of all right or power to remove her from his control.

"Almighty God!" exclaimed Mrs. Fraser, "am I then doomed to be his slave for ever! Must I drag on the chain that galls me, that preys on my very life, and endure to pass the remnant of it away from you, from my sisters? No, no, death would be a thousand times preferable!" and here, exhausted by her emotion, the poor young creature fell back on her pillow.

"We must not give way to despair, my precious darling! Mr. Fraser may yet be moved to pity, and consent that you should see us. When he is made aware that your illness has been occasioned by the separation from me, from your sisters, he *will not*, no, he *cannot* refuse to let us meet, yes frequently meet, and write to each other. You will tell him this, darling, and pray him to consent to your wishes. He loves you, it cannot be otherwise; and he will not refuse that on which your happiness—your health depends!"

"Mother, you know him not. Could you believe that I had given way to despair, until I had tried every means to bend his cold and stubborn heart? I have prayed to him, on my knees I have prayed; I have covered his feet with my tears, as an abject slave before her tyrant master, to be allowed to see you, or even to write to or to hear from you; but I knelt and prayed in vain. He will never relent; and nought remains for me but death, to free me from this cruel bondage. Finding him deaf to my entreaties, I tried to move him by a patient submission to his will; I dried my tears whenever I heard his step, and I importuned him no more; but all, all was unavailing. He believes that, while he lavishes gold and all the gaudy trappings of wealth about me; while he heaps the most costly pearls and diamonds on me, I have no cause to be unhappy; and that, while he calls in a host of physicians to minister to my ruined health, leaving my tortured heart to prey on this weak frame, he has nothing to reproach himself with."

Well and truly had the artless and wretched wife revealed the nature of her stern husband. The disclosure agonized her fond mother, whose worst thoughts of the man who had torn her child

from her, who would rudely burst asunder the bonds of love and nature that united her to her family, had never gone so far as to believe, that, were the health, the life of the wife he professed to adore, at stake, he would not instantly consent to aught that would save her. As the conviction of his utter sternness and callous nature was now forced on her, the doting mother's pale face became almost terrible, from the expression of despair imprinted on it. She gazed on her faded child; a shudder passed over her frame; and she lifted her tearful eyes, as if appealing to God, now that hope of mortal aid had left her; and then exclaimed, "And it was *I*, *I*, the mother who should have shielded her, who should have warned, nay, prevented her from wedding one so old, so stern, as this terrible man, who allowed her to bestow the inestimable blessing of her hand on one so wholly unworthy of it! My child, my poor child, can you forgive your unhappy mother for having consigned you to such a fate? Alas! alas! the pressure of poverty had blinded me to the possible chances of misery to my daughter; and with sorrow — oh, how deep yet unavailing! I must now admit, that I have merited the heavy punishment that has fallen on me! Would to God it had fallen on me alone!"

"You must not accuse yourself, dearest mother. *Indeed*, you are not to blame. Who could have foreseen, that aught in human shape could be so cruel as to part us? You saw me form this new hated marriage without any symptom of repugnance; nay, more, with cheerfulness, confident as I felt, that through it I should be enabled to see you, darling mother, and my dear sisters, restored to an elegant competency, if not to affluence! I thought only of the future happy home, the many comforts and enjoyments, my marriage would secure you; and in this anticipated happiness I forgot the age, the ugliness, the chilling manners of him who was to enable me to bestow it. And had he done so, mother, I would have blessed him; I would have been as the most dutiful of daughters to him; and my whole study would have been to repay his generosity to those dearer to me than life!"

The countenance of Mrs. Herbert while her daughter spoke might have offered a study to an artist who wished to paint the *tragic muse*. Never had Selina beheld aught so touching — de-

spair and resignation struggled for mastery in that pale face, as all he unselfish and loving nature of her child was revealed to her. And to think that such a creature, so young, so beautiful, so pure and noble-minded, should be so wholly, so irrevocably in the power of one so stern, so lost to every feeling as Mr. Fraser, was torture. In the long and wakeful nights which had passed since her adored daughter had been taken from her, when she tried to imagine some cause for his cruel conduct, and conjured up every probable motive, her worst fears had never pictured him as dark, as terrible, and revoltingly selfish as he was now proved to be.

She felt that with such a man her child must be wretched. Nurtured in the lap of affection, and surrounded from her infancy by a mother and sisters, who, owing to the perfect sympathy that existed in their tastes and thoughts, loved her with a tenderness even beyond that common to such near relations, how was she to bear the change to solitude, with such an uncongenial companion? It was as if a delicate plant, reared in a choice conservatory, where it had been watched with skilful care, had been removed to some dreary and chilling atmosphere, where it must soon fade and die; and she looked at the altered face of her child, and saw that such must be her fate; nay, that already had the work of destruction commenced; for the fragile being before her could not long bear up against the cruel destiny she had wrought for herself, when, through love for her kindred, she had wedded the terrible man who ruled it.

"Hark! did I not hear a voice?" exclaimed Mrs. Fraser, starting up from her pillow, and terror imprinted on every feature. "Oh! mother, disguise yourself quickly, for should he come we are lost. Help her, Selina; load her with all those envelopes that conceal her from my fond eyes; surely they will preserve her from his. Quickly put up her own dark hair, and tie on the false. Ah! there, I can no longer recognise her; even the comfort of seeing her in her own natural shape and appearance is denied me;" and the poor invalid burst afresh into tears.

"Would to Heaven, darling, that I were never to leave off this disguise, could it secure me the happiness of being near you, of looking at your sweet face, of hearing that dear voice!"

The noise that alarmed Mrs. Fraser was the moving about of the housemaids to perform their matinal tasks; and now the grey dawn began to peep through the shutters, and reminded Mrs. Herbert that she must resume her place as nurse, and be prepared for the entrance of the housemaid, or of *him*, the most dreaded, should he descend to inquire after the invalid. A few drops, of a composing nature, were administered to Mrs. Fraser, at whose request her mother partook some also; and Selina, after receiving the thanks of both mother and child for the warm sympathy she had evinced for them, stole stealthily to her chamber, to dress, and replace "the nurse."

In a few weeks a visible improvement took place in the health of Mrs. Fraser. Her mother's presence seemed to revive and re-animate the principle of life in her delicate frame, as the change from a deleterious climate to a mild and genial one revivifies a broken constitution. The hours of fond communion passed together; the particulars demanded and given of those dear sisters, so often thought of, had made the hours fly so rapidly, that when weeks had gone by, the mother and daughter felt as if only days had passed. There were times when Mrs. Fraser's heart revolted at seeing her mother treated as a menial, when her stern and ill-bred husband questioned her rudely, or when the housekeeper or housemaid spoke to her familiarly; but Mrs. Herbert taught her to conquer these movements of anger, by making her feel, as she did herself, that these little annoyances should give pleasure rather than pain, as furnishing proofs that her disguise had successfully imposed on those who offered them.

"Ah! but mother, how dreadful it is that I am getting well," would Mrs. Fraser say; "for the moment the doctors announce my convalescence you will be sent away from me; and how, after having been again accustomed to the blessing of having you near me, can I ever submit to our separation?"

Whenever Mr. Fraser entered his wife's chamber she would assume a languid air, answer his inquiries in a low voice, and enact the invalid, when she was so much better that she trembled *lest her* physician should announce that fact to him; but they were

in no hurry to abandon a patient who still persisted in declaring that she was not cured, and whose husband was a nabob.

"I should hate myself, dearest mother," would Mrs. Fraser say, "for practising deception about my health, were it not the only chance for detaining you near me; and yet to think, that to retain this blessing I keep you from my sisters, and that you are compelled not only to assume a menial garb, and be treated as a servant, but to injure your health, more precious to me than life, by living enveloped in that huge mass of drapery, that fevers though it conceals you."

Mrs. Herbert had explained to her daughter, that having seen in the newspaper the announcement of her illness, she had searched until she succeeded in discovering the physicians who had been called in to attend her. This discovery had been made by an old and faithful servant; through whose means, also, she learned that a nurse was required. Knowing, by report, that the person recommended by Dr. Percy was an unusually fat woman, the thought of representing her, could she but gain her consent to the measure, at once flashed across the mind of Mrs. Herbert; and she instantly went to Mrs. Norman, told her the truth, promising, that if permitted to personate her, all the remuneration received should be transferred to her. Mrs. Norman, herself a mother, and a good-hearted woman, was touched by the grief and agitation of Mrs. Herbert. Perhaps the desire of fulfilling a long and lucrative engagement in the country, without forfeiting the good opinion of Dr. Percy, by declining the one now proposed, had its might in influencing her decision. She finally yielded to the prayers of the agonized mother, with a proviso that Mrs. Herbert should remain out of sight of the doctor; and, having furnished that lady with the loan of habiliments and false curls, to enable her at once to enter the establishment of Mr. Fraser, and explained that the usual remuneration was a guinea a day, she saw Mrs. Herbert depart, filled with gratitude towards her, for having consented to her wishes.

"Yes, it 's very pleasant to serve a worthy person, as this poor lady certainly is," soliloquized Mrs. Norman, "especially where, by doing so, one can likewise serve oneself. I shall, for

the next few weeks, be paid for duties performed in the country, while my representative is earning money for me in London; and, after all, should Dr. Percy ever discover the truth, he, with his good heart, will readily pardon this proof of the goodness of mine."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

It was edifying to hear Mrs. Herbert counselling her daughter to obedience to her husband, and to a patient submission to his will. The excellent woman left no means untried, to strengthen the mind of this gentle and inexperienced creature; but, perhaps, of all the arguments made use of, there was not one which produced so strong an effect on her mind, as the assurance, that her mother could better bear the separation, could she be assured that her child was submitting to it with fortitude, and not ruining her health by repining.

"On the spirit in which we receive trials, dearest, depends their effect," would she say; "patience robs them of much of their bitterness; and the consciousness of having fulfilled our duty to the utmost of our power, becomes a balm to the wounds inflicted by Fate. Let this balm be yours; merit the protection of the Almighty, by submission to *his* will. Remember that there are many persons more unfortunate than you; and that the greater the trials in this life, the greater is the merit of submission. Let me have the comfort of knowing, that the impropriety I have committed, in entering clandestinely a house, whose master had prohibited my presence, has, at least, had a salutary effect on your health and mine."

"But you will write to me, will you not, dearest mother, and let me write to you? Selina, dear, kind, good Selina, will be the medium of communication between us. I know she will. With a letter, now and then, from you, darling mother, I will not sink into despair, as before."

We leave it to casuists to decide, whether or not the fond mother was wrong in yielding to the prayers of her child; or whether *Selina* committed a crime in pledging herself to convey the corre-

spondence between them; but even should a verdict be pronounced, by rigid moralists, against Mrs. Herbert and Selina, for thus yielding to the reiterated entreaties of Mrs. Fraser, they would nevertheless, be consoled by the approval of their own hearts, for having lightened the burden that pressed so heavily on that of the young and unhappy wife.

And now the physicians pronounced the sentence so long dreaded, that Mrs. Fraser was so much better, that a nurse was no longer required. Mr. Fraser immediately signified his desire that Mrs. Norman should leave at the close of the week, only two days of which had to elapse; and his wife was endeavouring to muster up all her strength of mind, to support the separation. Ever since the notification of the improvement in her health had been made to him, which was not until some weeks after those in the secrets of the sick chamber had been aware of the fact, he had become a much more frequent visitor in it, so that the long conversations between the mother and child were broken in on; and they hardly dared count on an hour's freedom from his presence. Without any occupation, he walked continually from room to room of his splendid mansion; scolded the servants, found fault with everything that was done, and incapable, from his bad temper and ill-governed mind, of enjoying a moment's repose, it seemed to be his study that nobody else should, if he could prevent it. Mrs. Herbert, from her first entrance in the house, had incurred his especial dislike. He never saw her without treating her with a rudeness, as unusual as ill-bred, towards a woman occupied in nursing the person he professed to love above all others—his wife. He would mutter his dislike of fat people in her hearing, and his distaste of old women with flaxen locks; and her equanimity under his unprovoked insults had no effect in mitigating them. The evening of the day previous to that named for her departure, Mrs. Herbert was exhorting her weeping daughter to bear their approaching separation with courage, when the door of the chamber was violently thrown open, and, pale with rage, Mr. Fraser rushed in.

"Leave my house, leave my house, instantly," shrieked he, his discordant voice raised to its utmost pitch. Mrs. Herbert

grasped a chair for support, and seemed ready to sink on the floor. "I have discovered you, base and shameless woman, thus to steal into my house, to teach my wife disobedience and deception."

"Mr. Fraser, Mr. Fraser, how can you insult my mother?" exclaimed his wife, pale as marble, and trembling with emotion, as she interposed between them, and embraced Mrs. Herbert.

"She shall go this moment, this very moment," screamed he, "or I will send for the police, and consign her to their charge, for entering my house in disguise, and under a fictitious name."

"And if you do," repeated his wife, drawing herself up, with a dignity that seemed to surprise and awe him, "never again I look on you as other than a cruel tyrant, who, by his unnatural treatment in separating me from my family, has compelled the disguise and the deception he would now punish so severely."

"My child, he is your husband," said Mrs. Herbert, her trembling lips almost refusing to articulate the words.

"Hypocrite!" exclaimed Mr. Fraser, "would you now again deceive me? who is it that has fostered this audacious spirit in a weak girl who before you stole like a thief into my house, dared not question my will, nor seek to frustrate it?"

"You know her not. Oh, my mother, that you, who are all goodness, who have exhorted me so strongly to obedience to this cruel man, should be accused of conduct of which you are so wholly incapable! It is your own injustice and violence, Sir, that has conquered my weak submission. There is a point, and every throb of my heart, and every pang of my wounded feelings tell me so, at which submission would be base and unworthy. Let my mother leave this house, as it becomes a gentlewoman to do, and permit me to occasionally see and hear from her and my sisters, and you will find me in everything else as submissive as before."

"Never, never. Rather would I see you dead at my feet; rather know that my resolution had killed you, than consent to this. I command your mother to leave my house this instant, and never more to pass its doors."

Mrs. Herbert pressed her child to her heart, pronounced a blessing on her head, and resigning the fainting Mrs. Fraser to the arms of Selina, hastily left the room, followed by her ruthless

son-in-law, uttering the most cutting reproaches while she put on her cloak and bonnet, and not losing sight of her until she left the house. He then returned to his wife's chamber; who, hardly restored to consciousness, lay extended on the sofa, where Selina had placed her. She shuddered at his approach, and this involuntary symptom of dread and dislike increased his anger.

"When your scheming mother descends to assuming a disguise and false name," said he sternly, "she should be more careful about her letters. Look here; I found this epistle on the stairs; it fell out of the envelope, which was addressed to her by her false name, and, urged by an irresistible impulse, I perused it, and discovered the cheating that had been practised. This, however, shall never occur again. I will remove you from the reach of your family. I will take you out of England; and it will depend on yourself, whether I overlook the insubordination you exhibited this morning, or not. Have Mrs. Fraser's clothes packed up," said he to Selina, "for we shall leave England at once. But stay," added he, "were you privy to the plan of Mrs. Herbert for entering my house in disguise? who hatched the project? was it Mrs. Fraser, or her mother?"

"Mrs. Herbert, believing her daughter's life to be in danger, and trembling with anxiety for her, sought to attend her as nurse. Mrs. Fraser was wholly ignorant of the deception, until it was accidentally discovered, some time after Mrs. Herbert was in the house."

"You confess, then, that you were aware that the pretended nurse was Mrs. Herbert, yet you made no communication of that fact to me!"

"I saw Mrs. Fraser's health derive such benefit from the care of her mother, that I dared not interfere," replied Selina, timidly.

"Then you cannot be surprised that I at once dismiss you from my wife's service. Leave my house forthwith."

"What! send away the only person who can be of use to me," said my gentle mistress. "You cannot surely be so cruel, in my present weak state, too!" and tears flowed down her face.

"There shall be no confederates in my house, to aid and abet the schemes carried on against my peace," observed her brutal husband. "I will have only those about you whom I can depend on, who will consult *my* wishes, and not your's. The sooner you leave the house the better," continued he, addressing Selina. "Come with me, and deliver up your mistress's jewels and valuables. The housekeeper can wait on you," added he, turning to his weeping wife, "until a suitable attendant is found for you."

Selina approached Mrs. Fraser, pressed her trembling hand to her lips, and breathed a prayer for her, and then, filled with pity and regret, hurried from the room, leaving her mistress bitterly weeping. She rendered up to Mr. Fraser the costly jewels, and other valuables in her charge, he carefully counting out each, according to the inventory of them delivered to her on entering the house. When this ceremony was finished, he paid her the salary due; and, relaxing a little from his sternness, offered her a present.

"No, Sir, I can accept nothing from one who thinks ill of me," observed Selina; "but, before I depart, pardon me if I warn you that you are trifling with your own happiness, that you will destroy the health of Mrs. Fraser. If you had listened, as I did, Sir, to the excellent counsel Mrs. Herbert gave her daughter, how different would your thoughts be of her! Be assured that never did two more admirable women exist than Mrs. Herbert and Mrs. Fraser, or more deserving of happiness."

"What bribe have they given you for this fulsome praise?" demanded the terrible old man, his sallow face assuming an expression of cunning, mingled with dislike; "and when, pray has it become the usage for ladies' maids to take on themselves to give their opinions on family affairs to their masters?"

Selina attempted no reply to this speech; but, making him curtsey, descended the stairs, left the house, and walking the nearest stand of coaches, entered one, and was driven to kind friend Mrs. Steadfast's, where she met with a most cor reception, and would have felt comfortable, could she but fo the unhappy fate of her late charming and interesting mistr

whose thraldom filled her with the deepest pity and regret. In two days after, she read in the "Morning Post," among the list of fashionable movements, the departure of Mr. and Mrs. Fraser, from Grosvenor-square, for the Continent, and sighed, as she reflected how sad and painful such a journey must be to the poor young creature, leaving all dear to her behind, and with so stern and tyrannical a companion. "Alas!" thought Selina, "here 's, indeed, a splendid misery, from which I can foresee no release. Her husband will probably live long enough to preclude all happiness. Her youth will wear away under his galling yoke, or else she will sink into a premature grave, the victim of his cruelty!"

In a few days after, the inquiries of Mrs. Steadfast, made at the request of Selina, in search of a new situation, were crowned with success. The young and beautiful Duchess of Glenallen, whose name figured continually in the newspapers of the day, as "the observed of all observers," the leader of the *ton*, the glass of fashion, required a *femme de chambre*, or rather, something between an humble companion and a lady's maid. A milliner, who was employed by her grace, and who happened to be a near relative of Mrs. Steadfast's, named the subject to her, and offered to recommend Selina, who, the bearer of a letter from the *modiste*, proceeded the following day to Glenallen House, and was admitted to the presence of its noble mistress. The remarkable beauty and aristocratic air of the youthful Duchess greatly struck Selina, but the natural dignity of the high-born lady was so tempered by a graciousness of look and manner, that at once captivated those of an inferior station who approached her, that the grandeur of the stately Duchess was forgotten in the feminine softness of the beautiful woman. When, in answer to her grace's inquiries, Selina informed her of the cause of her having left her last situation, the Duchess looked even more kindly at her than before. "Poor Mrs. Fraser, how much I pity her!" said the Duchess. "You were quite right not to have betrayed her and her unfortunate mother to that dreadful old man. I might, I suppose, refer to Mrs. Herbert for a testimonial of your abilities, not that I in the least doubt them."

"Certainly, your grace."

The letter was written, and, in due time, a most satisfactory answer was received, accompanied by a note for Selina, filled with expressions of gratitude and kindness for her devotion to her late mistress, and regret at Mrs. Fraser's having lost so faithful an attendant.

Selina now entered on her new duties, and her gentle mistress lightened them by her amiability. She had been some days in the splendid establishment, at Glenallen House, before she saw its master, every hour increasing her admiration for the Duchess.

One morning the Duke's valet tapped at the dressing-room door, and requested to be informed when his grace could be favoured with an interview by the Duchess.

When Selina delivered the message, the Duchess changed colour, and an expression of annoyance overspread her beautiful face. "Tell him I will see the Duke in an hour," said she; and then she lent her cheek on her hand, and remained a few minutes absorbed in reflection, evidently of a painful nature, if the curved brow and compressed lips might be taken as proofs of chagrin. "Give me a glass of water, and drop some sal volatile into it, my good Miss Stratford," said her grace.

Selina did as she was told, and the Duchess, having drank the contents of the glass, sighed deeply, and, making an effort to resume her self-composure, commenced the duties of her toilette.

From the first day that she entered the house, Selina had been struck by the unequal spirits of her noble mistress, but she had never witnessed her evince such visible signs of painful emotion as since the interview with her lord had been requested. Frequent sighs heaved her exquisite bust, and an impatience in submitting to being attired, never previously noticed by her attendant, certified that the expected visit was anything but agreeable to her. Her toilette completed, she looked at the *pendule* on the mantelpiece, and seeing that the hour was arrived when the Duke might be expected, she told Selina to take in her bouquet and salts the boudoir, and place them on the table near her *bergère;* and she then betook herself there.

When Selina, having fulfilled her lady's behest, was leav

the boudoir, an aged and infirm gentleman entered it. She drew back to allow him to pass, concluding that he must be some relation, perhaps the grandsire of the Duke or Duchess. Of tall stature, though bent by age, there was something peculiarly aristocratic in the appearance and bearing of this old gentleman. "I fear I have disturbed you earlier than your accustomed hour of leaving your chamber, Duchess," said he, with an air of perfect good breeding.

"It is of no consequence," was the reply; but the tone in which it was uttered was so unlike the usually bland one of the fair Duchess, that Selina was impressed with a conviction that the person to whom the words were addressed did not stand in the relation to her mistress that she had supposed. No; to a parent of either herself or her husband, more respect, or warmth of manner, would have been shown. Selina left the room, wondering whether it could be possible that the foppish old gentleman she had seen could be the Duke of Glenallen? but there was such a disparity of years between him and the Duchess, that she could hardly bring herself to think so. She had heard from a Frenchwoman, who had been the *femme de chambre* of the deceased mother of the Duchess, and who, having also served that lady herself, before her marriage, was still, though past her labour, retained in the establishment as an humble friend and favourite of her noble mistress, that her Grace was an heiress of great wealth; and this circumstance seemed to render her marriage with one so very much her senior still more improbable.

On entering the dressing-room, she found that Madame Fanchon was there, to pay her diurnal visit to the Duchess. "Ah! Mademoiselle, where is Madame la Duchesse?" demanded she.

Selina informed her of the summons that had called her mistress so much earlier than usual from her chamber, and mentioned having seen an old gentleman in the boudoir.

"Dat is de Duke, Mademoiselle, have you not seen him before? *ah! mon Dieu*! he vill make her ill; I am sure he vill. He alvays does ven her asks an *entrevue*. — *Cher ange! quel malheur* to have a bad old man for husband." Then, as it con-

scious of her indiscretion, the Frenchwoman resumed, "You look good Mademoiselle, you have de education, and are not like dose giddy young vomen, who chatter, chatter, and repeat vhatever dey do hear," forgetting that she, herself, had just given a proof of indiscretion, which rendered her comment on the gossiping propensities of other *femmes de chambres* somewhat out of place, "I may derefore say vat I tink to you, Mademoiselle, vidout being afraid you tell to all de vorld, and it *is* a great comfort to be able to open de mous, and let out all de *triste triste* toughts dat do press on de heart, and veigh it down."

Selina bowed assent to the observation; and encouraged by this, the old Frenchwoman was evidently about to give expression to her long hoarded-up grievances, when the Duchess entered the room, her face flushed, and her whole air denoting discomposure. Her Grace, nevertheless, assumed a more calm demeanour when she saw her old servant, "Ah! *ma bonne* Fanchon, how are you? the rheumatic pains better, I hope?"

"A leetle, a leetle, *cher ange*. But you, you not look like yourself, not happy?"

"I am only hurried, my good Fanchon, I must return to the Duke, who is waiting for me in the boudoir;" and so saying, the Duchess drew a gold key from a chain that was inside her dress, opened her *escritoire*, took out a banker's book, wrote a cheque, and having replaced the book, returned to the boudoir, kindly nodding to the old Frenchwoman, and saying "*A demain ma bonne Fanchon, à demain.*"

"Ah! I do guess vat all dat means. Bad old man! alvays vanting money. He vill ruin her if he live long; and she, *cher ange*, pays dear for de *liberté* to do vat she please. Bad man! bad man!"

All this seemed strange to Selina; but though her curiosity was strongly excited, she would not, on any account, question the old woman, who, apparently, only waited for a little encouragement, to disclose all she knew.

In a few days after, a letter, with a black seal and deep mourning edges, was delivered to Selina; and great was her astonishment when the signature revealed to her that it came from

her late mistress, Mrs. Fraser, and announced that she was now, a (not inconsolable) widow. Yet there was no levity, no elation in the tone of the letter; it said that poor Mr. Fraser (how often is the term "poor," applied to the worthless dead!) had died of an attack of gout in the stomach, in France, ten days after he had reached that country; that she had returned to England with the remains of her late husband, and was now blessed with the society of her mother and sisters, who had taken up their abode with her, passing the first weeks of her widowhood in seclusion. She ended by saying that she longed to see Selina, whose devoted kindness she never had forgotten and never could forget.

Selina obtained permission to go and see her former mistress.

"I hope, my good Stratford, that she will not seduce you from me," said the Duchess kindly, "for I assure you I should consider such an event as a real misfortune, so well do you suit me in every possible way."

"And I, your Grace, am so deeply impressed with your indulgent goodness, that with all my attachment for Mrs. Fraser, I should grieve to leave your service for hers; now that with her good mother and sisters, and released from the tyranny of so harsh and stern a husband, she can no longer, as formerly, stand in need of me."

"Then unhappiness is the strongest claim to your services, my good Selina?" said the Duchess.

"I did not mean to say so, your Grace," replied Selina, blushing, and looking embarrassed.

"Don't deny the sentiment that is so honourable to you, my good Stratford," observed the Duchess, sighing deeply, "and let me hope you will long remain with me."

CHAPTER XXXV.

Selina found Mrs. Fraser looking beautiful in her widow's weeds. Never had she appeared to greater advantage; for the grave reflections which the late unexpected event had produced in her mind, had lent a serious, if not a sad expression, to her lovely face. Her reception of Selina was full of grateful affection; not

was that of her mother and sisters less cordial. They duly appreciated the consolation she had been to Mrs. Fraser; and the constancy with which she had borne insult from him, who was no more a denizen on earth, rather than betray the confidence reposed in her. How altered was now the aspect of that house, formerly resembling nothing so much as a gilded prison; where no light footstep was ever heard, no voice of gladness ever sounded; where every one, save its stern gaoler, moved stealthily through the mansion, afraid to awaken an echo; and where he, like some fabled sorcerer of romance, seemed to cast a spell over all, to destroy the peace he could not himself enjoy. Now, although a becoming gravity pervaded the abode, that no sounds of rejoicing, no loud knocks of visitors were heard, and no symptoms of feasting or mirth seen, to announce the recovered freedom of its young and beautiful mistress from the state of intolerable thraldom in which she had been held; there were unmistakeable proofs of peace, if not of happiness. The doting mother could now fearless, press her child to her heart, and lavish on her those attentions dictated by affection. The duteous daughter could repay them by her tenderness; and the fair and gentle sisters, who had wept so many tears at being separated from the lovely being to whom they were now re-united, basked in her soft smiles, even although those smiles were less frequent, and less joyous than their own. The youthful widow had witnessed death, and in his hours of suffering had pardoned, nay, more, had pitied, and would have saved her husband, had it been in her power. The possession of vast wealth, bequeathed to her by the departed, in the spirit of atonement for pain often inflicted, and patient endurance of it, joined to an unremitting care and attention to soothe the bed of sickness and death had not dazzled her; yes, he, the stern, the obdurate old man, had died blessing her; and she could not look around on the solid comforts and splendour that surrounded her, without remembering that she owed them all to *him*, whose cold remains were so lately consigned to the grave.

Mr. Fraser had bequeathed his widow all he possessed; and the first use she made of her great wealth, was to secure a noble *independence* to her mother and sisters. The house was redolent

f the perfume of flowers, and the carol of birds, the property of ıe fair sisters, transported there from their former abode. Every ıplement of feminine occupation had a place in the *salons* for- ıerly so gloomy. Books were within reach on every *guéridon* nd table; and gentle voices, and loving words, and sweet smiles, ave that indefinable charm peculiar to an abode inhabited by oung, accomplished, and amiable women; and presided over y one so capable of superintending it as Mrs. Herbert.

"I wish, dear Selina, you could return to me," said Mrs. raser. "I should so like to have you, who shared my trials, artake my present —," happiness, she was going to say; but he paused, as the word rose to her lip, and, blushing deeply, dded, "No, I must not say happiness; it would be ungrateful) the *dead*, — to *him* through whose generosity I am enabled to njoy the manifold comforts around me, and the greatest of all, ıe society of my dear mother and sisters! If you had seen him, s I did, through his fatal malady, Selina, you would, like me,)rget that he was ever harsh and austere, and remember only his egret for past failings, and the kindness evinced at the last. I annot" — and a tear which stole down her cheek, marked the ·uth of the assertion — "enjoy the advantages his generosity ave secured me, without regretting that they have been acquired y his death."

"If you possessed not dear relatives, who are so certain to romote your happiness as to render it independent of my poor ervices, I would leave any situation to return to you, dear Mrs. raser; but as, happily, you now require not my attention, I annot leave my present mistress, whose health, by no means ood, and whose spirits unequal, render my attention accept- ble."

"But you will come to see me, dear Selina, whenever you ın; will you not? Be assured that, in me, as well as in my dear ıother and sisters, you shall ever find true and constant friends! ou must not refuse to accept a slight proof of my regard;" and lrs. Fraser arose from her sofa, opened her *escritoire*, and taking om it a bank note, forced it into the hand of Selina. "Remem- er that, in all circumstances and in all times, you may count on

me," resumed the lovely and gentle being; "and that under my roof you will ever find a welcome and a home when you desire it."

The mother and sisters of Mrs. Fraser were no less kind than herself to Selina, who left the house filled with gratitude at having secured such friends.

A growing good will by degrees sprung up between the worthy old Frenchwoman and Selina. The former soon perceived that Mademoiselle, as she called her, was far superior to any person in her station with whom she had hitherto been brought into contact; that she possessed none of the vulgar and idle curiosity, peculiar to *femmes de chambres;* and that she performed her functions in the service of the Duchess more as a labour of love than a mere discharge of them for profit. Adoring the Duchess, the good woman felt disposed to love all who sympathized in her affection for that bright and beautiful being, while she resented, as a personal injury, any symptom of coldness, or a less fervent admiration for her than her own. The Duke's name was never mentioned in her presence without its producing a change in her countenance, a deep sigh, almost amounting to a groan, or an impatient shrug of the shoulders. "Ah, if you knew all, Mademoiselle, how you would pity *ce cher ange!*" would the Frenchwoman say; "and yet, dat one vid such beauty, such talents, such fortune, and high birt, should, trough de vickedness of oders, become an object of pity, instead of one of pride, to dose who know her, almost breaks my old heart. No day does pass dat I do not tremble for her. Vid her varm heart, no von to love, whom it is not a sin, a crime to love. *O, mon Dieu*, vhere vill all dis end! All de vorld is at her feet. She is so beautiful, dat all de men adore her; and so leetle vain, dat de vomen forgive her for her beauty. Her husband does not advise, does not varn her; he leaves her to float about in de dangerous sea of fashion, like a ship dat has no von to steer its course, to point out de rocks and de quicksands dat may destroy it. She is so young, *pauvre cher ange*, she not know de vorld at all; and if she do vat is wrong, vat is crime, she vill von day avake to such misery, dat *it* vill kill her, or — she vill kill herself."

Such were the reflections that used to burst from the over-

burthened heart of the old Frenchwoman, and fill that of Selina with pity and dread. Often, when she answered the summons of the Duchess's bell in the morning, she found her with heavy eyes and pallid cheeks, that betrayed that tears more frequently filled up the hours of night than sleep; and although, when she paid her daily visit in the dressing-room, the Duchess would endeavour to conceal her depression of spirits under the mask of affected gaiety, she could not impose on her old and faithful servant, who during the rest of the day would be wretched.

Though extremely attached to her, it was evident that the Duchess avoided a *tête-à-tête* with Madame Fanchon. Was it that she dreaded the remonstrances of the privileged old creature, who had been more the humble friend than servant of the mother whose memory she still fondly cherished, as well as her own devoted attendant since her birth? Whatever the motive might be, it was clear to Selina, that the Duchess invariably avoided a *tête-à-tête* with Fanchon, and made excuses, whenever, as was often the case, it was solicited. The lowness of spirits increased, the traces of tears became more frequent, and for whole hours the Duchess would sit leaning her head on her hand, so wholly absorbed in reflections, — and painful ones they must have been, judging by the expression of her countenance, — as to be totally unconscious of the presence of Selina. Then she would start from her reverie, look at the *pendule*, dress in a hurry, go to her boudoir, and remain there until her carriage was announced. Sometimes it would remain at the door, the Duchess forgetting it had been ordered, until it was too late to go out; and then, even more dispirited than before, she would enter her dressing-room, to attire herself for some grand dinner at which she was expected to appear, when it was evident she was almost unequal to the fatigue of dressing.

During the long nights that Selina had to sit up for her noble mistress, the old French woman, whose confidence in her discretion had now become quite established, related to her the history of the childhood and girlhood of the Duchess, without her having given the slightest encouragement to such a measure. So long had her hoarded secrets been shut up in her own heart, not,

as it was plain, from discretion, so much as from not having hitherto found a person to whom she thought she could safely confide them, that she now poured them out freely, interpersed with many ejaculations and severe censures on those to whom the Duchess's fate had been confided. We will relate the tale in a less diffuse and more sober style.

The Duchess of Glenallen was left an orphan when only in her fourth year. Her mother, one of the most faultless beings on earth, died in giving her birth; and her father, the Marquis of Oakhampton, followed his beloved wife to the grave, in four years after; leaving his only child one of the richest heiresses in England. Of the two guardians to whose care he bequeathed his child, one died within a few months after the trust had been confided to him; and the other was, as it unfortunately turned out, one of the last persons in whom such a trust should be reposed; being a man whose indolence and sybarite habits of self-indulgence had, and with good cause, become proverbial. He, lamenting the trouble and responsibility entailed on him by his guardianship, requested a female relation to provide a governess for the infant heiress: the person selected was a weak-headed, good-natured Frenchwoman; who soon became so passionately attached to the little girl, that she lavished on her all the tenderness and indulgence calculated to injure a nature disposed to exert, even at that tender age, a self-will not often seen in children so young.

Madame de Montauban had once been a mother, and lost her daughter at about the same age as the pupil now confided to her care. The little girl had been very beautiful, and her death almost occasioned that of her mother, so intense had been her grief for the loss. Every handsome child of a similar age, ever seen afterwards, reminded the poor bereaved mother of her lost one; nay, she fancied she could trace a striking resemblance in each to her departed Julie. In the little Lady Louisa Evermond, this fancied resemblance struck Madame de Montauban more than ever; hence she abandoned herself to an adoration for her that amounted to little less than idolatry. The clever child soon perceived the influence she had acquired over her weak governess, and exercised it, if not rudely or violently, with a pertinacity that never failed

carry whatever point she was bent on obtaining; and, as Madame de Montauban never combated her self-will, the poor erring woman remained unconscious that her pupil could be indocile if resisted.

The *femme de chambre* of her late mother was, by desire of the Marchioness, always to remain with her daughter; and as she transferred all the affection she had borne to her late mistress to the child, it is not to be wondered at, that Lady Louisa grew up wholly unaccustomed to the slightest constraint, and was disposed to give, instead of to receive the law from her governess. Lord Maplebury, the relative to whom her guardianship now devolved, had, to spare future trouble to himself, decided that Madame de Montauban should continue to fill the same post near Lady Louisa, when that young lady advanced to girlhood, that she was to occupy during the childhood of her pupil. Hence there was no chance for the over-indulged girl finding, when she entered her teens, a governess who might correct the errors engendered by her predecessor. Had any one told Madame de Montauban that she was injuring her pupil by her injudicious indulgence, and irrational mode of bringing her up, she would not only have resented such a charge with indignation, but would have been convinced of its utter injustice.

She loved Lady Louisa so fondly, was so vain of her beauty, and accomplishments, that she never imagined the possibility that even the most fastidious critic could detect aught to find fault with in a creature so lovely and amiable. The truth was, the defects in her pupil were so seldom called into action, that Madame de Montauban, herself a very sweet-tempered, kind-hearted woman, was, if not wholly unconscious of their existence, at least far from being acquainted with their extent: yielding a ready assent to most, if not all the wishes of the young lady, no occasion was afforded for the exhibition of ill-humour or frowardness; or if some symptoms of petulance were occasionally suffered to appear, their duration was so brief, and the *amende*, in redoubled marks of affection, so quickly followed, that they were soon forgotten.

Lady Louisa Evermond was passionately fond of music, and *required no stimulus to* urge her to devote the due time and atten-

tion necessary for becoming a proficient in it. Drawing was to her a positive pleasure, instead of an irksome task. Reading she delighted in, because the books furnished for her perusal were much more calculated to amuse than to instruct; hence, the governess congratulated herself on having the most docile pupil in the world; and boasted that "*ce cher ange* never gave her the least trouble, but was quite as desirous to pursue her studies, as *she* could be to incite her to them."

Lady Louisa was not like the generality of over-indulged young persons, ungrateful, or ungracious to her governess. On the contrary, if she neither feared nor respected her very much, she loved her a great deal; and conscious that Madame de Montauban entertained for her the most devoted affection, warmly repaid it.

When Lady Louisa Evermond had achieved her sixteenth year, Madame de Montauban was seized by an illness which, after the duration of three weeks, put a period to her existence. It was then that the orphan girl, rich in beauty and in fortune, became sensible, for the first time, of the isolation of her position. The kind friend, who had doted on her to such a degree as to be either blind to her faults or too partial to reprove them, was now no more. She had no longer by her side one who was not only ready to fulfil all her wishes, but who even endeavoured to anticipate them, and who seemed to think she was only sent into the world to save her pupil from every care and annoyance. Deep was the grief of Lady Louisa for her governess. A thousand traits of the gentleness, fondness, and indulgence of poor Madame de Montauban, were now recalled to her mind, and as many self-reproaches came with them, at remembered slights and offences on her own part; viewed by her, when they occurred, as scarcely meriting blame, but which she would now have given all she possessed to recall. Grief is often a corrective of the errors of youth. It ripens, while it sobers the mind. How far it might have had this beneficial effect on that of Lady Louisa, no opportunity of judging was afforded; for, unfortunately, no sooner was the guardian of that young lady made acquainted with the death of Madame de Montauban, than he applied to a female relative of his to recommend some one to *fill her place.*

CHAPTER XXXVI.

In the course of a week, a lady arrived at the villa, near London, where, for the sake of having masters from the metropolis, the residence of Lady Louisa had been chosen. A more unfortunate selection of a governess to correct the errors engendered by the kind-hearted Frenchwoman could not have been made than in Mrs. Western. Grave and unbending to austerity, a smile or kind word as seldom emanated from the lips of this rigid disciplinarian, as gentle thoughts did from her cold heart. Her stiff carriage and stern countenance made a most disagreeable impression on Lady Louisa, and the harsh tones of her voice achieved it. The natural good breeding of the young lady, led her to make some attempt to do the honours of her house to the stranger, and the effort was a painful one, for her grief was increased, rather than diminished, when she saw the person who was to take the place of her poor dear Madame de Montauban. She, however, soon regretted that she had taken the trouble of enacting the hostess, when she saw Mrs. Western assume all the airs of a *gouvernante* towards a child of some eight or nine years of age, instead of observing the respectful politeness due to a young lady of nearly double that number of years.

"I trust that your ladyship has not been idle since the death of my predecessor," said Mrs. Western, unceremoniously taking the *bergère* never occupied since Madame de Montauban had sat in it.

"I have been too much afflicted by the death of the friend of my youth," replied Lady Louisa, and the tremulous movement of her lips, and tones of her voice, bore evidence to the truth of her assertion, "to think of anything but the loss I have sustained."

"I am sorry that the lady I have replaced did not better fulfil her duty, than to leave one so long under her care, ignorant of the impropriety, nay more, the sin, of dwelling on painful subjects, and of giving way to useless regrets."

"I must beg, Madam," and Lady Louisa drew herself up to the utmost altitude of her height, "that nothing in the shape of a

censure may be uttered against one whose death I shall always deplore, and whose memory I shall ever fondly cherish," and here a passionate burst of tears proved the depth of her emotion.

"Poor young lady," exclaimed Mrs. Western, her cold grey eyes glancing sternly at the weeping and agitated girl before her. "I see that I have much to undo before I can hope to establish that steady equilibrium of mind, without which mortals must ever be the sport of circumstances, and the slaves of their own over-indulged sensibility."

A feeling nearly allied to anger and indignation stopped the tears of Lady Louisa. To shed them before one so heartless and stern, would, she thought, be unworthy of what was due to herself. A presentiment that this was but the commencement of a series of annoyances to be expected from the disagreeable woman before her, and which it would require all her strength of mind and fortitude to resist, flashed through her thoughts, and she became calm and dignified in a moment.

"It may be as well, Madam," said she, "that we should at once come to a perfect understanding with respect to our relative positions, before any thing can occur that may render them disagreeable or offensive. I have entered on my seventeenth year, a period when young women are generally emancipated from the care of a governess, and when, as in my unfortunate case, they are motherless;" and here her lips again trembled as the recollection of her own isolated position occurred to her; "the *rôle* of the governess chances to that of *chaperon* or companion, in which light only can I consider you."

"Age, in my opinion, should make no difference in the position of a conscientious governess," replied Mrs. Western. "*Some* young ladies are as much children at sixteen, ay, or even after they have entered their seventeenth year, as at eight or nine," and here the speaker smiled superciliously; "and consequently require a governess to correct their false notions, and regulate their morbid feelings, quite as much as children do."

"I am not disposed to reason on the hypothesis you have assumed," observed Lady Louisa, proudly, and somewhat maliciously, "if I were, I might say, that with some persons, even

the advanced age of half a century, does not always preclude errors and defects. I shall simply confine myself to stating that in no other light than as a companion or *chaperon* can I consider you; and that any attempt on your part to enact any other *rôle*, will find me not only refractory but unmanageable."

The pale stern face of Mrs. Western became flushed with anger as she listened to this speech. She had been told by the lady who had recommended her to the guardian of Lady Louisa, as a fit person to replace Madame de Montauban, that she must be prepared to find her pupil a high-spirited, spoilt child, whom it would be her duty to correct, and bring to reason.

"Firmness and severity are the only weapons that will enable you to conquer the haughty and ungovernable character of this young lady," said Mrs. Austin, "and if you wish to fulfil your duty, you must not be sparing of either."

Be it known to our readers that Mrs. Austin, the giver of this counsel, and near relative of Lord Maplebury, the guardian of Lady Louisa Evermond, had her own motives for urging Mrs. Western to harshness, and severity towards her future pupil. The Duke of Glenallen, an old and profligate voluptuary, whose fortune had sustained as much injury from the ruinous extravagance in which he had through a long course of years indulged, as his constitution had from the dissipation to which he had abandoned himself, was now anxious to barter his title for wealth, and to find some young and lovely being, who, for the sake of the ducal coronet which he could place on her brow, would consent to soothe his declining years, and sacrifice her youth and beauty to age and infirmity. But where was this *rara avis* to be found? Loveliness without wealth would not suit him, and wealth without beauty would not satisfy him. To Mrs. Austin, an old friend, the Duke confided his wants and wishes only a month before the death of Madame de Montauban; and it instantly occurred to her, that through her influence with her relative, Lord Maplebury, she might assist in arranging a marriage between the Duke and his ward, Lady Louisa Evermond. To be sure, such a union could not fail to be considered most disproportionate. So young, so lovely, and so rich as the lady was, she could not, the moment

she entered society, escape being sought by a train of suitors, whose claims to her regard would leave those of the aged Duke immeasurably behind. She must therefore be sought and won before she entered the great world — but how was this to be accomplished? attended as she ever was by her fond and watchful governess, who never quitted her side, and who had keenness of apprehension enough quickly to discover the views of those around her, and to defeat them the moment she deemed it necessary. The Lady Louisa was so happy, too, with her kind and doting governess, that she could have no inducement, save love, almighty love, for wishing to change her situation. So great, too, was the notion entertained by Madame de Montauban, of the merits of her beautiful *élève*, that there were few men, whatever their deserts might be, that she would consider worthy of becoming her husband. How little chance, then, could the old and infirm Duke have to conciliate her good opinion, or to blind her to the utter unsuitableness of such a marriage! No, Mrs. Austin saw there was no hope of success in that quarter, and had abandoned the project when Lord Maplebury called on her to announce the death of Madame de Montauban, and to request her to find a successor for that lady.

"But you must remember, my good cousin," said Mrs. Austin, "that Lady Louisa is now past sixteen, and that she requires a *dame de compagnie* rather than a governess."

"Call her what you will, *dame de compagnie*, *chaperon*, governess, anything, provided I am not to be troubled. Really my health and habits will not permit me to be harassed."

"Nevertheless, my good cousin, in a few months more you must have this young lady home, must have her presented at Court, fill your house with company, and escort her into public."

"Not for worlds! not for worlds! Don't name such a thing. Why the very notion puts me in a fever. Feel how my hand burns; why did I consent to be named one of her guardians? It was perfect madness. But who could have anticipated that the other two guardians would die, and leave me in for the whole trouble?"

Mrs. Austin was more than half tempted to offer to relieve her *cousin* from the charge which weighed so heavily upon him, and

o say that *she* would undertake to receive Lady Louisa under her oof; but the dread of this proposal being rejected, checked her, or she knew that Lord Maplebury was disposed to suspicion, and iked to defeat the projects of those whom he thought had any esign on him. She recollected, too, that *he* knew she was in mbarrassed circumstances, for he had more than once come for- ard to her aid with considerable sums; hence she fancied that he ould attribute her offer of receiving his ward to its true cause, — n interested motive.

"Yes, yours, my dear cousin, is in truth a troublesome task, nd it is a pity you ever undertook it. But you are so kind-hearted, o unselfish, that you are prone to think only of others, and to orget and forego your own comfort."

Perhaps in the whole circle of her acquaintance Mrs. Austin new not an individual as selfish as Lord Maplebury; and so per- ectly convinced was she of this fact, that had she been called on o name the person the most engrossed by self, her cousin would ave instantly occurred to her mind. With this conviction, it equired no little hypocrisy to utter the compliment she had just ronounced, and no slight confidence in the weakness and vanity f him to whom it was addressed, to suppose it would be accept- ble. But when was flattery found to be unacceptable? and the nowledge of mankind evinced on this occasion by the artful and esigning Mrs. Austin, was repaid by the complacency of the eer.

"You are right," replied he, "I *do* trouble myself too much bout others, and after all, *à quoi bon?* One never gets any eturn for it, no gratitude. Why, would you believe it, it was nly last week that my rascal of a cook refused to take physic, lthough I put myself into a fever in endeavouring to persuade im."

"How good and kind of you!"

"The soups and *entrées* for three days before proved to me that is palate had lost its delicacy of taste, *ergo*, he required physic. sent for my doctor, had Beauplat examined, and a medicine was rdered for him; the rascal positively refused to take it; nay, only ncy his ingratitude, when I endeavoured to persuade him, the

fellow said that he was sure I cared not a rush about his health, and only thought of my own dinner. There 's gratitude for you! After that, busy yourself about the health of your servants! In the same way, there 's Janillion, my *maître d'hôtel*, who has a cough, the very sound of which attacks my nerves so much, that I am forced to order him out of the room; and when I said he must either get cured or leave my service, the fellow had the coolness to tell me that in France an old servant was never discharged because he was ill, and insinuated that I thought more of my own ears being annoyed by his cough, than of his lungs suffering."

"How shocking! But this comes from your being too good, too kind; indeed it does."

"I believe you are right, cousin. But let us now think of the person who is to be sent to replace Madame de Montauban. Do you know of any one?"

"Yes, I do know a lady, very highly recommended, and your ward, by all accounts, requires a very superior person, for I have heard that she is extremely self-willed and unmanageable."

"Not more so, I dare say, than the rest of her sex. You are all self-willed and unmanageable, cousin, which is the reason that I have never married."

"You are determined on not bringing Lady Louisa to your house, which you ought to do, or else find a home for her, with some single lady of good family, who could present her in society."

"We 'll think of that in another year. It will be quite time enough. There 's no hurry. Many girls are not presented until eighteen; and an heiress ought to be introduced into the world rather later than sooner than any other young women."

"Well, then, I will at once engage Mrs. Western. Shall I send her to have an interview with you, and take your instructions?"

"On no account. I leave all the arrangements to you. Give her all the instructions you think necessary, but don't let me have any more trouble on the subject."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

Mrs. Western was engaged, and despatched, after having received the advice and instructions of Mrs. Austin to rule her pupil with a firm hand, and not, on any account, to give way to her in a single point. "If you do, your stay will be short, I can assure you," were the last words of Mrs. Austin, when she bade her farewell. How well disposed Mrs. Western was to follow this counsel, her first interview with Lady Louisa proved. But the disposition to tyrannize increased every day, as her natural acerbity of temper was aroused into action by the dignified coldness with which her attempts to control the young lady were met. The home, hitherto so cheerful and happy, was now rendered unbearable to Lady Louisa; who, before a fortnight had elapsed after the arrival of Mrs. Western, felt herself compelled to write to her guardian, to request the dismissal of that person.

Lord Maplebury was suffering under a slight attack of gout, when his ward's letter reached him; and having read only the signature, he instantly despatched it to Mrs. Austin, who perused it with no slight satisfaction, as every line bore testimony how faithfully *her* instructions to Mrs. Western had been carried into effect. "Yes, my scheme works well," thought she. "I saw that Mrs. Western was a short-sighted fool, as well as an ill-tempered woman; had she not been so, she would have neglected my advice, and conciliated the good-will of Lady Louisa, who could so well repay her indulgence hereafter; and I almost feared she would. But now all is right, and it only remains for me to see the Duke of Glenallen, and make my own terms for securing him the hand of the fair heiress."

The terms were made; Mrs. Austin was not only permitted, but incited, to render the position of Lady Louisa insupportable; no answers were returned to the letters of complaint addressed to her guardian, who never read a single one of them; and who was told by Mrs. Austin, to whom he sent them, that the fault was all on the side of his ward, and that Mrs. Western must not be interfered with. Meanwhile, the Duke of Glenallen was advised

by his confidante to take a villa, the grounds of which joined those of the one occupied by Lady Louisa. Here his Grace had opportunities of seeing the lovely heiress during her daily walks; and such was the impression made by her beauty on his susceptible heart, that even her fortune, greatly as he stood in need of it, became only a secondary object in his mind. He found means, through his *valet de chambre*, to corrupt the housemaid of Lady Louisa, who nightly placed a letter, breathing the most passionate vows of love, on the pillow of the young lady, whose youth and inexperience rendered her unconscious of the impropriety of the measure. Had Madame de Montauban been alive, the first letter would have been at once shown to her by her pupil; but such was the treatment she had experienced at the hands of Mrs. Western, that she was determined to repose no confidence in her. The love-letters were therefore kept a secret; and, truth to say, were perused with pleasure by one who felt that she stood alone in the world, and had no friend to protect her from the insulting tyranny of Mrs. Western.

About this time a new proof of the desire to vex and control Lady Louisa was given by her *femme de chambre* being discharged, without even a cause being alleged for so arbitrary a measure. Mademoiselle Fanchon had been, as we previously stated, with her since her birth; had been her mother's maid, and doted on her young mistress. Madame de Montauban, who valued and esteemed her, had always treated her with great kindness and consideration, and Lady Louisa was greatly attached to her. This last fact was the sole cause of her dismissal; and Lady Louisa, who felt it to be so, shed many tears, when she saw her humble but faithful friend driven from her house.

The Duke of Glenallen, who, through his valet, was made acquainted with every thing that occurred in the establishment of Lady Louisa, sought an interview with Mademoiselle Fanchon, *the day of* her dismissal. He encouraged her complaints, *conciliated her good* will, and took so lively an interest in the fate of *her young lady*, that the old Frenchwoman, captivated by his *urbanity* and condescension, and above all, by the purity with

which he spoke her own language, lent a willing ear to his advice.

"Go to Lord Maplebury," said the duke, "see him, and tell him all you have told me. He will, he must, release Lady Louisa from the tyranny under which she now pines, and replace you with her."

Well did the duke know that Mademoiselle Fanchon's visit to Lord Maplebury would produce no effect, but he had his own motives in urging it. "If you do not succeed in righting your charming mistress, we will then see what can be done to free her."

Mademoiselle Fanchon adopted this counsel; was told Lord Maplebury was engaged, and could see no one. A long letter which she wrote, inclosing one from Lady Louisa, was, like all the former ones, sent to Mrs. Austin; and after waiting a few days, Mademoiselle Fanchon again sought an interview with the Duke of Glenallen, who was, she now considered, the only friend her poor young lady or herself had in the world. A less simple-minded woman than Mademoiselle Fanchon, might well have been deceived into this belief; so artfully and skilfully did the old *roué* enact his part.

"What can be done, my good Mademoiselle?" demanded he; "you see it is useless to expect any amelioration in your poor dear young lady's terrible position from Lord Maplebury. Has she no other friend, no relation from whom she can claim protection?"

"Alas! no."

"Does any plan suggest itself to you, Mademoiselle?"

"Only one, your Grace, and that is *le dernier ressource*! It is for Miladi to elope vid me. I have some monies, several hundreds of pounds, left me by her dear dead moder, and de savings of my vages. On dis Miladi could live in a little cottage, until she comes of age, and I vill be her *femme de chambre*, *femme de charge*, *cuisiniére* and every ting, until she is twenty-vone."

The duke shook his head, and said, "You forget, Mademoiselle, that Lady Louisa's reputation might be compromised

by such a step, and more, that her guardian would have the right to reclaim her."

"*Bon Dieu!* den dere is no vay to save *ma chère* Miladi?"

"Yes, there is *one* way, and but *one;* and yet there are many objections to it."

"But if it is de only vay, ve must take it."

"It is for me to free Lady Louisa by making her my wife."

Mademoiselle Fanchon started with such undissembled astonishment, that the old *roué*, whose skill in the arts of the toilette, and in concealing the ravages of time, had, he hoped, given him the appearance of a man at least twenty years younger than he really was, felt hurt and mortified.

"It is true, I am not so youthful a suitor as Lady Louisa might expect," observed his Grace; "but my rank, my fortune, render me in all other respects a most eligible *parti;* and after all, I can see no other mode of freeing her. If I did, be assured, Mademoiselle, I would not have suggested this one; for however great the attractions of Lady Louisa, and I hear they are very powerful, I have no desire to marry, and pity for her cruel position has alone prompted my proposal."

"Yes, yes, you speak vat is right. It is de only vay to save *ma pauvre maîtresse.* To live nearly five years more vid dat horrid Madame Vestern is too terrible to be tought of. Yes, yes, de only ting is to marry. But how is it to be done?"

"Leave all that to me. I will obtain a special license, have a female relation of high rank in a chaise and four on the road outside the garden of Lady Louisa's villa; you will be on the spot to accompany your lady to my house in London, where my chaplain will be in readiness to bestow on us the nuptial benediction."

"But vill Miladi Louisa consent to go vid you, to marry you," demanded Mademoiselle Fanchon, looking doubtingly.

"I hope she will; for what else can she do? You had better write her a letter, stating all I have now told you, Mademoiselle."

"It is no use; dat horrid Madame Vestern vill not allow a letter to reach Miladi. *Hélas! Hélas!* vat a *pénible position!*"

"Write the letter, nevertheless, and I will see if I cannot

find means to convey it. I really feel such pity for this young lady, that there is nothing I would not attempt, to rescue her."

Mademoiselle Fanchon's letter, enclosed in a passionate one from the Duke, urging an elopement and marriage, as the sole mode of freeing herself from the shackles of Mrs. Western, reached Lady Louisa safely. She still hesitated whether she should adopt, the alternative proposed; but some fresh acts of aggression on the part of her *gouvernante*, the following day, decided her. The next night, when all in the house slept save the housemaid, the youthful heiress, escorted by that person, left the villa for ever, and in a few minutes she found herself in the arms of her faithful Fanchon, who led her to the carriage of the Lady Isabella Villeroy, the sister of the Duke of Glenallen, who received her with an affectionate warmth that greatly soothed and reassured her drooping spirits. They proceeded to London, and stopped at the mansion of the Lady Isabella, where every thing had been prepared for their reception.

"Here, my sweet sister, — for so you must permit me to call you; to-morrow you will be really so," said Lady Isabella Villeroy, — "you will find an end of the slavery and annoyances you have undergone;" and she embraced Lady Louisa, who now, for the first time, saw her face in the well-lighted drawing-room. Great was her surprise as she looked on a countenance that bore evident marks that at least half a century had passed over it, leaving many deep furrows traced by its progress. There was something incongruous (to her thinking) at least, in a girl of little more than sixteen being addressed as a sister, by one who looked old enough to be her grandmother; and then came the thought of how the Duke, who had looked so handsome, (she had only seen him at a considerable distance,) could have so elderly a sister.

"She is probably by a former marriage, for she must be at least twenty-five years his senior," thought Lady Louisa. "I am sorry that I don't find in his sister a person nearer my own age, of whom I could make a friend. But *he* must be friend and all to me *now*. How beautifully he writes, and what a distinguished air he has! I wonder whether he is really as handsome when near as he appeared at a distance. How romantic, that we should

never have met, never have spoken, until we meet at the altar! I never read any thing in a novel so romantic as this!"

Lady Isabella Villeroy had too much quickness of apprehension, not to have remarked the disagreeable impression produced by her age on the mind of her future sister, and too much tact, not to wish to remove it. She spoke of her own bad health, which, as she asserted, made her look many years older than she was, and added, that although her face had lost the freshness of youth, her heart still preserved it, as her dear sister should find, when they knew each other better. She accompanied Lady Louisa to her chamber, remained with her until Madame Fanchon was dismissed, thus preventing any confidential communication on her part, and was the first in the morning to undraw the curtain of Lady Louisa, whom she left not until they together entered the carriage that was to convey them to Grosvenor Square. The Duke met them in the hall of his mansion, and so admirably had his wig-maker, valet, and tailor performed their parts in getting him up, that at the first glance his future bride felt perfectly satisfied with his appearance. Short lived, however, was her satisfaction; for no sooner did he approach close to her, than, in spite of all the aids of art, she detected the melancholy fact, that her bridegroom was even considerably older than his sister, the Lady Isabella Villeroy. Tall, finely-formed, and free from the *embonpoint* so destructive to the would-be-juvenility of elderly ladies and gentlemen, the Duke, at a certain distance, was still a very fine-looking man; but had Lady Louisa following his Grace's example, trusted less to her eyes, and used an opera-glass with a very powerful lens, as he had been wont to do when looking at her walking in the pleasure grounds of her villa, she could not have been mistaken about his age. Sundry deep lines, known by the appellation of crow's feet, encircled the Duke's eyes, the lids of which, too, were greatly wrinkled, and the orbs themselves were dim and faded. His brow was a map traced by the harsh finger of Time. Nor did the fair and profuse locks that shaded it, rende its appearance less ancient. His whiskers were so precisely the same colour as his hair, that they instantly suggested the notion, that not to Nature's cunning hand, but that of a skilful wig-maker

did he owe them, and his teeth were so even and regular, that most gentlemen of his age might be tempted to inquire the name of the maker.

Such was the exterior of the Duke of Glenallen, the first man who had awakened a tender thought in the breast of the young and beautiful Lady Louisa, who now shuddered as he took her hand, drew her trembling arm through his, and led her to the state drawing-room, where an altar had been arranged, near to which his Grace's chaplain, in full canonicals, stood with open book, ready to perform the solemn ceremony that was to unite age and youth, beauty and infirmity, in the indissoluble bond of wedlock.

For a moment the unfortunate and deceived girl felt disposed to refuse to permit the marriage to be solemnized. She trembled at the thought of pronouncing the fatal vows, that were to bind her for ever to the strange being before her! The snowy locks, and toothless gums of age would have been less repugnant to her than the curious specimen of the florid gothic she was contemplating; for age, when no attempt to conceal or disguise it is made, inspires, at least, respect; but "the painted show;" the wrinkled, be-wigged, and be-whiskered, old man by her side; who was smiling, and looking the enraptured lover, excited only her disgust; and she wished herself back with the tyrannical Mrs. Western, to endure again all the insults heaped on her, rather than become the bride of the Duke. But then came the thought of his kindness — his desire to emancipate her; and, above all, the girlish shame and timidity, which deprived her of the moral courage to decline having the marriage ceremony performed now, when all was prepared for it. No; she felt that she could not avow the truth; she could not acknowledge that it was only while she believed her suitor to be a young man, that his vows were acceptable to her; that she was ready to avail herself of his aid to escape from the severity of Mrs. Western, and the thraldom in which she was held by that tyrannical woman. She must now submit to the fate entailed on her by a tissue of circumstances, over which she had no controul; and while shrinking with dismay and disgust from the man who fondly clasped her hand in his, she must

pronounce the fatal words that united their destinies. A desperate courage replaced the trembling timidity and fear that, a minute before, had filled her breast. She suffered the Duke to lead her to the altar; forced herself, although in a voice scarcely audible, to utter the prescribed words; and felt the ring placed on her finger.

She seemed as if in a dream, — a painful, a terrible dream it was! until at the completion of the ceremony, when the bridegroom pressed his lips to hers — those rosy virginal ones, which had never before known the touch of man; — she uttered a faint cry, and would have fallen to the ground had not the Duke supported her. It was some time ere she was restored to consciousness. When she opened her eyes, and saw her husband bending over her on one side of the sofa where she had been placed, and the plain face of his sister on the other, she closed them again with an involuntary shudder, as if to shut out a sight too painful to be borne. A sigh, amounting almost to a groan, burst from her oppressed bosom; and then, summoning all her strength of mind to her aid, she declared herself to be better, and then thanked the Duke and his sister for their kind attention.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

Lord Maplebury's dislike to trouble, prevented him from taking any steps to mark his dissatisfaction at the stolen marriage of his ward. He contented himself, when the intelligence reached him, with giving instructions to his legal advisers, to see that the Duchess's fortune was secured to herself; a measure which the pride and affected disinterestedness of her husband prevented him from disputing; and when Mrs. Austin assured Lord Maplebury that he might consider himself fortunate in being now rid of all trouble about his ward, he was not disposed to question the assertion, or to regret the cause. Mrs. Austin received the sum she had bargained for from the Duke, and Mrs. Western touched a quarter's salary for the few weeks she had domineered over her late pupil.

The Duke and Duchess of Glenallen left England, a few days after their nuptials, and the prolonged *tête-à-têtes*, which tra-

velling afforded them, far from decreasing the dislike of the young and lovely bride to her old husband, only served to increase it to such a degree, that she found it impossible to conceal the symptoms of her repugnance. The *amour propre* of the vain old *roué* became wounded, as daily evidence of his wife's personal distaste towards him was revealed. His ill-temper, which he now took no pains to conceal, achieved the dislike previously excited in the heart of the Duchess, and made her reckless of annoying him. The admiration that followed her wherever she appeared, gratified her vanity; and the discovery that it vexed her jealous lord, only induced her to encourage, still more openly, the attentions of a train of admirers who surrounded her. The fame of her beauty and fascination, with all the spiteful comments that such fame never fails to excite, had spread far and wide, raising up a host of envious women, and scandal-loving men, prepared to question her claims, if not to admiration, at least to respect, when she returned to England. Her arrival in London produced, in fashionable *parlance*, quite a sensation. The women denied her beauty with a pertinacity and warmth, only to be equalled by that with which the men avowed it to be matchless; and ere the Duchess had been a month in London, the sceptre of beauty and fashion was decreed to her by the suffrages of those who elect a sovereign for the season. The impartiality with which the lovely Duchess received the homage of all her admirers, precluded any jealousy among them, until, in an evil hour, Lord Glastonbury, captivated by her smiles, entered the lists, determined to leave no art untried to make an impression on a heart that had hitherto resisted all who had attempted to subdue it. It would be a feat worthy his ambition, and, *coûte qui coûte*, he would essay it. He studied the tastes and character of the Duchess, and found that beneath much levity an under-current of strong feeling and romantic sentiment lay hidden, by awakening which, only could her peace be endangered, or her virtue overthrown. He assumed a melancholy air, would sit apart, with his eyes fixed on her face, while other men pressed around her, until by pursuing this line of conduct it attracted her attention, and excited her curiosity. Whenever he caught her glance, he would appear embarrassed,

turn away, yet resume his earnest gaze when he thought her unobservant of it; hover near to listen to the sound of her voice, and start as from a deep reverie when spoken to. A perseverance of some weeks in this system was crowned with success. That he admired her, the Duchess felt convinced; his passionate glances, his reserve, his abstraction, proved it more eloquently than all the attentions of the adorers who crowded around her. How much more touching was the passion that sought concealment, and was content to suffer in silence, than the demonstrations, *affichés*, by the herd who offered incense at the shrine of her beauty. She longed, yet feared to hear him own his love. She already felt there would be more danger in listening to *him*, than in hearing all the flatteries ever previously poured into her ear; yet, in proportion to her dread, became her desire to be assured that her vanity had not misled her, and that she was indeed beloved by one who was capable of feeling the passion with all the fervour and romantic devotion which her youthful imagination pictured, and the absence of which, in her other admirers, had prevented her heart being touched by their adulation and assiduities. Lord Glastonbury, experienced in all the wiles employed by his treacherous sex when they would ensnare the heart of woman, marked with delight the interest he had created, but, fearful of dissipating it, he forbore to approach near to his idol, or to appear conscious that she observed his devotion to her. Like a skilful angler, who tranquilly lets his bait float until his prey is secured on the hook hidden beneath it, he kept at a distance, elated to find that, unmindful of the attentions of her other adorers, the eyes of the Duchess were continually directed to him, and that she became silent and abstracted in turn. Often did she determine to address him when she passed near where he stood, but as often did her courage fail. A vague presentiment of danger associated itself with his image in her mind, and even this undefined dread invested him with new interest and attraction. When present, he occupied all her attention; when absent, her thoughts continually reverted to him.

Chance sometimes effects that which, without its interference, might remain long in embryo, or never be accomplished. One

night, on entering a ball-room rather earlier than was her wont, the robe of the Duchess of Glenallen became entangled in the branches of an orange tree placed near a column, against which Lord Glastonbury was leaning. He came to her aid to disengage it.

"I fear I am so awkward," said he in a low voice, his trembling hands betraying his emotion. The Duchess bent down to assist in disentangling the lace from the branch, and their hands involuntary met. A deep blush mounted to her very temples, and was succeeded by an extreme paleness.

"God heavens, you are ill!" whispered Lord Glastonbury, "let me lead you into the conservatory, the cool air there will revive you."

The Duchess took his arm; they walked slowly to the conservatory, and hope beat high in his heart as he felt her white and rounded arm, — which might have served as a model to a sculptor, so exquisite were its proportions, — tremble within his own. The coolness of the conservatory revived her, and they paused at a marble fountain in the centre of it, which threw up its silvery showers towards the roof of glass, through which the bright moon beams were distinctly seen descending, as if to mingle with the crystal showers. The rich perfume of the plants and flowers, the soothing murmur of the sparkling waters of the fountain, the distant sounds of the music, and the solitude of the spot, had a powerful effect on the feelings of the lovely but thoughtless woman, who, silent and trembling, dared not meet the impassioned gaze of Lord Glastonbury.

"Is not this a dream," whispered he, as he pressed her hand to his throbbing heart. "How often, loveliest, most adored of women, have I longed for a moment like this to tell you the secret that consumes my heart, that preys on my life. Pity me, oh, most perfect of created beings, and pardon a hopeless passion, pure as the lovely object that has given it birth! Why, why does an indissoluble barrier divide our destinies? We might have loved in innocence, in purity; but now, oh fool that I am to dream, that aught so divine as you *could deign to look on* one so unworthy as I am! yet, if a love

deeper and more devoted than ever before filled the breast of man can merit pity, well do I deserve yours."

The Duchess shuddered, and turned her eyes on her companion for the first time since they had entered the conservatory. Those dark, lustrous eyes were filled with tears, and her face was pale as marble. A presentiment of evil filled her heart; a sense of her own weakness overpowered her. Conscience, even in that moment of passionate love, whispered, that sin and sorrow (when were they ever far asunder?) would be the result of this interview; yet she had not strength to fly from the danger that menaced her. "Would that we had never met!" murmured she.

"Rather say, would that we were never more to part!" whispered her lover.

"Let us leave this place," said the Duchess; and a shudder shook her delicate frame.

"Oh! go not, until you pronounce my pardon for presuming to avow the burning passion that has so long consumed me. Trust me, loveliest of women, your honour is dearer to me than life. You have nought to dread from me. Have I not suffered in silence? have I not avoided, rather than sought you? and would I not have struggled on, enduring all the pangs of a hopeless passion, had not destiny drawn us to-night to this spot? Suffer me to love, to adore you? I ask no sacrifice, I require no reward. Pity, such as angels might accord to erring man, is all I crave; and *that* virtue need not deny. Only tell me that, had you been free, I might have hoped to aspire to the blessing of calling this hand mine" — and he pressed her snowy hand to his lips — "and I will ask no more."

"Oh! were I free," exclaimed the Duchess, her voice almost choked by emotion, "this hand should be yours, in the sight of God and man!"

"One word more, angel of my life: promise me that, should you ever be free — and the Duke's age precludes not this possibility — promise me that you will be mine, and only mine."

"*I* promise," whispered the Duchess; "and now, oh! now let us return to the ball-room, my absence will be remarked! yet

no, let us not enter the room together. I will go first, and you must go back through the ante-room."

Never previously had the Duchess had occasion to have recourse to a manœuvre like this. Her actions and movements, if open to the charge of levity, were free from even the thought of sin, or the dread of evil interpretation. An hour before, she would have derided the notion of fearing to enter the ball-room with any of the admirers who always fluttered around her; but now she was no longer strong in the proud consciousness of her own innocence; she had listened to the pleadings of a guilty passion — nay more, had avowed a reciprocity; and, sinfully anticipating the death of her husband, had engaged the hand which belonged to him, to another; and conscience whispered to her, that no longer dared she encounter the gaze of the crowd, as hitherto she had been fearlessly wont to do; and that henceforth, every look, every movement, must be guarded, lest she should betray, to the prying eyes of the malignant, the guilty secret of her love. Never, since the day she had approached the hymeneal altar, had she felt so timid, so embarrassed, as when, with unsteady steps, she again entered the ball-room. The crowd, the heat, the blaze of light, and the joyous sound of the brisk music, overpowered her so much, that she was glad when one of the train of her admirers came forward, and offered her his arm. And yet, when she had accepted it, she regretted that she had done so, for it seemed like an infidelity to him on whose arm hers had so lately rested. What would *he* think, should he see her thus familiarly leaning on another? and, for the first time in her life, the Duchess felt that her actions would henceforth be subjected to the approval or disapproval of one to whom she had given a right to judge them — to one to whom she could only be bound by a guilty bond.

"Where have you been, lovely truant?" lisped Lord Henry Ellestree. "Your *garde du corps* have separated, and gone in various directions in search of you. Had any one of them been absent, while you were unfound, he would have been sacrificed by the rest, on the suspicion of having the envied honour and hap-

pinessof being with you; but as all answered to the roll call, no jealousy was excited."

Accustomed as she was to the familiar tone of *badinage* of her admirers, never previously had it sounded so disagreeably to her ears as at this moment. It appeared to her as nothing short of insult; and the thought of how Lord Glastonbury would have been shocked had he heard it, increased her disgust.

"I have been rather indisposed," observed the Duchess, assuming an air of unusual coldness and reserve, "and sought relief from the excessive heat of the ball-room, which affected me the moment I entered it, in the conservatory, the freshness of which revived me."

"How cruel not to have given notice to your body-guard, who claim the privilege of attending you!"

"I would not accept royalty on condition of such attendance," replied the Duchess, in a tone of undisguised *hauteur*.

"Ungrateful sovereign! most despotic of all rulers! queen of hearts! is this your thanks to the chosen band who wear your chains, and dispute your smiles?"

"A truce to *badinage*, Lord Henry Ellestree, I pray you; I am, in good truth, tired of the folly of those who waste their time, and make themselves, and me too, ridiculous, by the exhibition of their attentions."

"You are surely jesting, fair Duchess; you cannot be serious! To behold your Grace — unattended by your faithful *garde du corps*, would be as strange, as to imagine Venus, your prototype, unaccompanied by the Graces."

At this moment Lord Glastonbury approached, and took his usual station, at a little distance from her who occupied all his thoughts. She felt grateful for his consideration, in not coming to speak to her, though she longed for him to do so; and was obliged to exert all her self-control not to fix her eyes on him. He looked even more pale and serious than formerly, but there was an expression of deep tenderness in his glance when it met hers, that touched her to the heart. And now, those who had gone in search of the Duchess, through the suite of rooms, and returned flocked around her, as had been their wont; each and all, uttering the most

flattering speeches, on the anxiety they had endured through her absence, and the satisfaction experienced at finding her. But no longer were their adulations acceptable to her who had hitherto received them with pleasure. They had become perfectly irksome to her, and struck her now, for the first time, as approaching to impertinence. What would Lord Glastonbury think of this open and public homage to her? Might he not deem it a great liberty taken, and attribute levity to her for permitting it? She would not for worlds that *he* should think ill of her. Better were it that she should at once dismiss the flattering coxcombs around her, than inflict a single moment's pain on him, even though such a step might draw on her the enmity of the vain and giddy train who had elected her as the object of their adulation.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

Actuated by these thoughts, the Duchess assumed a stateliness of demeanour, and a cold reserve in her manner, as new as they were unacceptable to her admirers, who looked at each other askance, to inquire the cause of this sudden and unaccountable change. Their troublesome assiduities were not, however, so easily to be got rid of, and as the Duchess turned with distaste from them, she wondered how she ever could have tolerated such folly. She forgot how often it had amused and flattered her, to see this train of young men of fashion haunting her steps, and disputing her smiles, while other beauties were left neglected, or occupied only the attention of one admirer. Lord Glastonbury, profoundly skilled in the female heart, many a one of which he had probed, dissected, and analysed, marked with inward satisfaction the alteration so visible in the behaviour of the object of his guilty love. Her youth, her exquisite beauty, her deep sensibility, and the artlessness with which it had been revealed, made an impression on him that surprised a heart grown callous from the number of attachments to which it had surrendered itself, and the brevity of their duration; but this new flame bid fair to burn longer, and *more warmly than* any of the former ones, as its object *was far more worthy of exciting* a lasting passion. What a triumph

would it be to his vanity to see the train of adorers, composed of the most distinguished young scions of nobility, who offered their homage to the lovely Duchess, slighted and dismissed for him! Yes, — the vain and heartless man, even in the commencement of an attachment, which would involve the peace and honour of a being, who, though giddy and fond of admiration, had never yet been pointed at by the finger of scandal, — nay whose youth, inexperience, and position had conciliated the indulgence of society, and prevented its attributing evil to her somewhat open coquetry, could pause to think of the gratification of his vanity without one reflection on the certain consequences of it to her!

Oppressed by the new and tumultuous feelings that agitated her breast, the Duchess sate silent and *distraite*. She declined the repeated solicitations of her attending admirers to dance, though known to be passionately fond of that exercise, and, fatigued and languid, she arose to depart long before the conclusion of the ball. She directed a look of adieu to Lord Glastonbury, so full of tenderness, that, as if unable any longer to control his feelings, he moved hastily from the spot he had occupied, and, advancing rapidly to her side, brushing past, as he did so, some of those who stood ready to dispute which among them should have the envied honour of leading her to her carriage, he offered her his arm; which she accepted, and they left the room.

The surprise of the rest of her admirers could only be equalled by their anger. They looked at each other aghast. "Strange!" "extraordinary!" "incomprehensible!" "*incroyable!*" broke from the lips of each, as their eyes followed the retreating steps of the lovely Duchess; and feelings of wounded vanity, malice, hatred, and all uncharitableness, filled their minds towards the detested rival, who had stepped in between them and their idol,— who saw in this imprudent step, on the part of her lover, but a new proof of the extent and excess of his ungovernable passion for her.

"Pardon me, loveliest, dearest," whispered he, "for thus breaking through the restrictions imposed by my desire to preserve, from even a suspicion, a fame dearer to me, oh! how infinitely dearer than my own, nay, than life itself; but I could

not resist the uncontrollable impulse. I could not see you depart, without uttering a few words of farewell. It was torture to me to behold the senseless herd, who flutter round you, enjoy privileges which I would die to possess, or to see this beauteous arm, the very touch of which thrills through my frame, confided to one of them. Say you forgive me; and, above all, tell me at what hour I may present myself at your door to-morrow."

The poor, inexperienced, and misguided young creature, to whom these words were addressed, was far from thinking that Lord Glastonbury's conduct was the result of premeditation, originating in a vanity that led him thus openly to display his influence over her, however detrimental the exhibition must prove to her reputation; and she went home, her heart filled by a guilty passion, and her mind in a tumult of delight, at the certainty that her feelings were reciprocated by the object of her unhallowed affection.

We will not attempt to paint the gradual progress by which Lord Glastonbury led his victim from the platonic and romantic attachment, to which at the commencement, he vowed his views were bounded, to the guilty one at which it arrived.

> "Skilled in each subtle, wily art,
> To taint with sin the mind and heart,
> Till virtue, chased by sophistry
> And reason, blind, no more can see
> The gulph, which passed, the erring fair,
> From transient bliss, wakes to — despair."

The conquest, although achieved, had not been as easily won as Lord Glastonbury had anticipated. Virtue still lingered in the breast of the Duchess, long after passion had gained entrance there; and a less practised and artful seducer might have been foiled in the attempts to pervert one, naturally prone to good, had she fallen into other hands. Steep and slippery is the descent from virtue to sin, when a guilty passion is permitted to plead its cause, to a heart which "though it loves the offender, yet detests the offence;" and so the Duchess found. Tired of a resistance, as disagreeable as it was unexpected, yet which, nevertheless, excited in Lord Glastonbury a still greater desire to subdue it, he at

length declared his intention of leaving England, of becoming an exile, in the hope that, in a foreign land, he might regain the peace denied him in his own, where the sight of the object of his idolatry kept alive the passion that was consuming him. The Duchess, doubtful of her own strength to resist his pleadings, admitted, although it cost her many a pang, that, by a separation only could she preserve her own esteem, and the world's respect.

All was arranged for the departure of Lord Glastonbury, when, in a luckless hour, she consented to receive his farewell. That interview, which was to have been their last for years to come, perhaps, for ever, saw her fall from virtue; and her seducer, now master of her destiny, abandoned his project of exile, — if, indeed, he ever seriously entertained it, — and remained to enjoy the triumph he had achieved.

For some months the passion of Lord Glastonbury continued unabated; and the devoted attention and respect with which it was evinced, consoled, in some measure, the object of it, who, no longer entitled to her own esteem, watched jealously for that of him for whom she had sacrificed it. Many and bitter were the pangs inflicted on her by conscience, even before she had any cause to suspect the truth of her lover; and often was her pillow steeped in tears wrung from her by the consciousness, that, however *he* might love, he *could not* respect her; and the belief, that the demonstrations of this sentiment, which marked his manner towards her, were only assumed to soothe her now morbid sensitiveness. There were moments, it is true, when, in gilded *salons*, in a blaze of light, and sparkling in diamonds, with the dulcet sounds of music floating around her, and the more dulcet flatteries of her lover filling her ear, that she forgot the remorse which, in hours of solitude and reflection, was preying on her heart, and abandoned herself to the pleasure that courted her. But brief was the cessation from wretchedness. Returned to her home, that home which she felt she had dishonoured, conscious that her very servants more than suspected her lapse from virtue, she would sink, pale and exhausted, into a chair, while her *femme de chambre* removed from her person the costly diamonds, that had excited

admiration and envy among many of her sex that night, and would seek her couch, to which sleep had now become a rare guest. Her countenance soon bore evidence of the anxiety of her mind; her beautiful form lost its rounded symmetry, and her eyes their lustre. Her lover was not slow to observe the change in her appearance; but it awakened no tenderness in his cold and callous breast. He marked the effect, but he searched not the cause of the wretchedness endured by his victim. He surprised her often in tears which were, however, quickly chased away by his presence, for love still held the bandage over her eyes, that concealed the worthlessness of him for whom she had sacrificed so much, and rendered his visits a source of happiness to her. When, however, she attempted to reveal the state of her feelings to her lover, and tried to paint the remorse and inquietude that tortured her, he would accuse her of weakness, and reproach, rather than soothe her, until she at length found that she had no sympathy to expect from him; that she was regarded but as the plaything of his lighter hours, the object who was to minister to his pleasure, but with whose cares and sorrows he could take no part. These cares and sorrows began now to show their inevitable effect on the health of the Duchess; and her heartless lover, whose vanity had been so highly gratified by the admiration her beauty excited, that his passion for her had been kept alive by seeing her the acknowledged idol of the circles in which they moved, now saw other women usurp her place, while she, wholly engrossed by her attachment to him, and the remorse it occasioned, made no effort to maintain the supremacy in society that constituted her firmest hold on his affections. Her tears and melancholy excited only his anger or *ennui;* her indifference to general admiration, he considered as a mark of little less than folly, and the *tête-à-têtes*, hitherto sought with pleasure, if not with the ardour that originally marked them, began, to use his own phrase, to be a bore to him. Habit, and a sense of delicacy to the feelings of the Duchess, alone induced a continuation of Lord Glastonbury's daily visits long after they had ceased to be at all necessary to his happiness; nay more, long after they had become irksome to him.

The Duchess marked his growing indifference, and the

anguish it inflicted sharpened the pangs of remorse, which, even in the heyday of love, and while yet the object of it seemed to live but in her presence, made themselves so acutely felt. Keenly did she experience the truth of the axiom, which asserts, that unhallowed attachments, being founded on no stable basis, and unsupported by any of the props, such as mutual esteem, perfect confidence, and the world's respect, which serve to maintain conjugal affection when the first impetus of passion has softened down into a less warm, but more enduring sentiment, can have but a brief existence. And was it to be thus neglected, thus left to her own sad and reproachful thoughts, that she had violated the laws of virtue, and sacrificed for ever her own self-respect, and title to that of others? Wounded love, offended pride, and womanly delicacy prompted her to break at once, and for ever, with him who had won her heart but to torture it; yet she had not sufficient resolution to carry this suggestion of her reason into effect, and she still wore the chain that bound her to her seducer, although its iron had entered into her heart, and was daily, hourly, preying on her life. Often did the beautiful lines of Goldsmith recur to her memory —

"When lovely woman stoops to folly,
And finds too late that men betray,
What charm can soothe her melancholy,
What art can wash her guilt away?

The only art her guilt to cover,
And hide her shame from every eye,
To give repentance to her lover,
And wring his bosom, is — to die."

"Perhaps *he* would regret me, and mourn that he had been neglectful unkind," would the Duchess say to herself, when in the solitude of her chamber she was left to brood over, almost to a moody madness, her own remorse, and her lover's altered conduct. "Oh! were I but sure that he would give a tear to my fate, — that I should be remembered with tenderness; yes, I would invoke death, all unfit as I am to meet it!" would she exclaim; "nay, I would anticipate the tardy approach of the pale

king of terrors, and, by a draught of Lethean power, seek in the grave the peace I can never more know on earth."

Such were the fearful thoughts that filled the mind of this poor spoiled child of fortune; this idol of fashion, who was looked upon by hundreds of the giddy throng among whom she moved, as an object of envy, to fill whose place they would have thought no sacrifice too great.

By how many trifling incidents may a sensitive heart be wounded, and an estranged affection be revealed. The *bouquets*, which Lord Glastonbury had, during the first months of his passion, been wont to present to the Duchess every day when he paid his visit, had been composed of flowers the odours of which she preferred above all others, and with them a bunch of violets was always placed, as a symbol of the donor's desire that his passion should be veiled from the eyes of the world, as that flower seeks to hide itself from the vulgar gaze. These *bouquets*, of late, were so far less choice than formerly, as to bear evidence, either that the selection had been confided to some one ignorant of the allegory, for no more violets were sent, and the flowers she peculiarly liked were not only left out, but sometimes days elapsed in which no *bouquet* appeared, and Lord Glastonbury came not.

It was at this period that the faithless lover became captivated by a new object, who effaced from his fickle heart the image of one who had "loved him, not wisely, but too well." So engrossed was he by his new flame, that he scarcely bestowed a thought on his prior one, who, tortured by the pangs of jealousy and self-reproach, admitted that her punishment for forsaking the paths of virtue, though severe, was well merited, and, coming through him who had lured her to sin, rendered it still more bitter. At one moment she determined to vent, when next they met, the reproaches which his inconstancy and ingratitude furnished but too much cause for. Yes, she would tear him from her heart, even though in doing so, the fibres of that agonized heart should be rent asunder. She would tell him to come no more, with false vows and deceitful smiles, to cheat her, but then returning love would master jealousy and anger, and tears,

burning tears, would deluge those eyes lately so lustrous; and all the woman, the fond, betrayed woman, would resume its empire over sterner feelings.

CHAPTER XL.

And now was revealed to Selina the cause of the inequality of her unhappy mistress's spirits, the frequent traces of tears on her pallid face.

"Can you vonder, Mademoiselle, dat I live in terror of some terrible catastrophy?" demanded Madame Fanchon. "I never can believe dat *ce cher ange* is guilty of more dan a *grande passion* for Milor Glastonbury. I could not bear to tink ill of her whom I have held in dese old videred arms ven she vos a baby, and who I love better dan my life. *O mon Dieu*, *mon Dieu!* to tink dat her moder who is in Heaven, could have von daughter less pure dan herself, von child not vordy to go to her in Heaven. No, Mademoiselle, I could not, I dare not tink such a terrible ting possible. But yet, I do know dat she loves, madly loves dis Milor. I have heard her ven she vas ill, and I vatched by her bedside, call him by such fond names, and sigh so deep, as if her poor heart vould break; and I have trembled vid fear dat de *femme de chambre* who vas here before you came, and was so very *curieuse* vould hear vat she said, and tell it to oders. Ah! Mademoiselle, de Duke very bad man. He not advise de *pauvre cher ange*. He not prevent dat *dangereux* Milor to come so often, vich he ought to do. Who can tell how strange is de human heart? Ven dis Milor Glastonbury used to come here every day, and stay hours vid de Duchesse, I did often vish he vould not come, and pray dat he might stay away. But of late, ven I see dat he not come often, and dat she is more sad dan ever, she looks paler dan before, and dat I see de marks de tears on her poor dear face; ah! den I vish he vould come, and bless him, and hate him more dan before for making her unhappy. I fear every ting. I find de blood run up to my very forehead, de servants do mention Milor Glastonbury's name; and if *dem* smile, *O mon Dieu!* I feel I could beat dem. I do

Duke knows dat the Duchesse love dis Milor, and he vill some day tell her he knows all, and vow he vill believe her guilty of all de sin, vich I, who love her, cannot believe, and he vill make her give him all her fortune not to be disgraced, not to be *exposé* to de vorld. And I know de Duchesse is so *fière*, dat ven he say he believes her guilty, it vill eider kill her, or she vill leave de house, never to see him no more."

Many were the tears shed by Madame Fanchon during this confidential disclosure to Selina, who, shocked at the communication, though filled with pity for her unhappy and erring mistress, felt wholly at a loss what step to take. To remain with one whom she could not help thinking highly culpable, if not wholly guilty, was so contrary to her principles, that she felt disposed to invent some pretext for resigning her place; and yet, to abandon her mistress when she was evidently suffering such wretchedness, would be, she thought unkind, ungrateful.

The next day a request from the Duke of Glenallen to see the Duchess, produced even an increase of agitation and inquietude on the part of that lady; and it was so evident, that Selina experienced the deepest compassion, when she beheld her mistress, with trembling limbs, proceed to the *boudoir* to meet her husband.

The Duke of Glenallen had been long a silent, but not unobservant spectator of the change in his wife's character. He had marked when she had abandoned general admiration and homage, for a deeper and more concentrated sentiment; but he held out no hand to snatch her from the fearful gulph which yawned to destroy her peace, and his honour; he uttered no warning to deter her from ruin. What, to him, was the certainty of wretchedness that must await a woman like his wife, when, having strayed from virtue, and forfeited her own esteem, she should too late discover the unworthiness of him for whom she had sacrificed herself? That she never had loved, never could love *him*, he felt convinced. What, then, was it to him on whom she bestowed those affections that never could be his? All he required was, that she should not outrage *les bienséances du monde*, by *permitting her lover to afficher*, and compromise her in society.

while *he* would make her comprehend that *his* silence and forbearance should be repaid by the absolute disposal of her large income being confided to him. The horror and contempt, excited in the mind of the unhappy Duchess, when her unprincipled husband revealed to her his knowledge of her sin, and the conditions on which alone he would consent to conceal it, are not to be described. Shame, deep and burning shame, crimsoned her cheek, and made her hide her face with her hands, while tears gushed through her fingers, and fell in showers on her tortured breast, without affording even a moment's relief to her bitter agony.

"Spare me, spare me, the deep humiliation of this hour!" cried she, her utterance impeded by sobs. "Why, why did you make no effort to save me from the toils that ensnared my youth, — from myself. You might have entitled yourself to my respect, and have enabled me to preserve my own."

"Why this agitation?" said the Duke, "I did not mean to give you pain. Indeed I thought, young as you are, you could hardly believe that my eyes could be shut to that which was, through the unguarded and open display of your *tendresse* for Lord Glastonbury, made so manifest to all the world. A husband, though generally the last to be made acquainted with such matters, cannot be *wholly* blind, when decorum is violated, and his feelings overlooked. You have put it out of my power to plead ignorance of your conduct; but yet it rests with me, to *appear* as if I knew it not, and so enable you to retain your position in society. You now know the terms on which I will consent to this; and if you are wise you will not reject them." So saying, the Duke withdrew, leaving his wife a prey to shame and despair.

"What now remains to me?" demanded the Duchess, when left again to her own overwhelming reflections. "It was torture to meet the glance of my husband, while I believed him in ignorance of my guilt; but now, — now when he has declared his knowledge of it, how can I ever see him more? Had he reproached, spurned me, better could I have borne it; but to have attempted to traffic with my sin, to make terms for the concealment of my shame, — oh, it is too, too dreadful! Where can

urn me for aid! An orphan, with no pitying mother's breast on vhich I could weep my sin, — no sister's heart to appeal to, to hield me from its fearful consequences, — no friend to lean on, vhat, — what is to become of me? Under this roof I cannot re-nain. I could not again submit to the degradation of hearing a rice set on the concealment of my shame, and that, too, by *him* vhose duty it was to protect my inexperienced youth from the langers that beset my path, to save me from — myself. I was ıot hardened; I would have listened to his warning voice; I vould have followed his counsel; but, with no pity for the poor vretch he had duped into a marriage so disproportioned, he llowed me to become an easy prey to the seducer, and to my own nad passion. O God! and have I lived to hear a husband pro-ose terms like those he offered? Am I, indeed, so lost, so dis-raced, that he should propose them, and I not die of shame in istening? To have impunity thus offered for guilt, is worse, oh! ow infinitely worse, and more degrading, than open exposure by justly exasperated but honourable husband. Had mine been uch, I would have deplored my sin with burning tears at his feet, – I would have entreated permission to hide my guilt in some ecluded spot, where my penitence might, after long years, efface portion, at least, of the stain; and, if his pity were denied me, would, without a murmur, submit to the sentence that sent me orth from his roof an outcast. But to confront a husband, whose ilence may be bought with gold! Oh! it would be agony, and nfamy, too great to bear. Better would it be at once to incur the enalty of guilt, to brave the world's contumely, so hard, so ter-ible for a sensitive woman to encounter,— to fly with the partner f my sin, and hide myself for ever from those who now flatter nd follow me, than to remain beneath this roof, and meet again he Duke. I will write to Lord Glastonbury; I will propose to im to take me away from all this misery, this degradation. He s the only being on whom I have a claim, the claim of guilt in-urred for his sake! There was a time when no day passed in vhich he used not to say, that his happiness would never be com-lete until I was all his own; — when *one* roof would shelter us, ne destiny unite our *fates*. But, woe is me, that time has passed.

My remorse, and its results on the beauty that won him, have cooled his affection. How often have I marked with agony the change but too apparent in him! and yet, knowing this, must I urge a claim on his pity, or his honour, for the protection his love would no longer prompt him to offer me! Whichever way I turn, disgrace and misery await me. O God! O God! have mercy on me."

The Duchess's note soon brought Lord Glastonbury to her presence. There was an incoherence in it that alarmed him, *not* for *her*, (for, selfish and unfeeling, he cared little for his victim;) but for himself it greatly frightened him.

"There must be something wrong," exclaimed he, "some discovery made by the Duke. I hardly know whether I ought to go to her. Such a step may compromise me in some way or other. She is so cursedly romantic, so filled with false notions, that she is capable of any folly. Yet, if I do not go, she may take it into her head to come here; yes, by Jove! and fix herself on me. That would be a terrible affair. Had she done so at first it would have been different; and I sometimes wished her to elope with me then, when my passion was in its zenith. I dreamed of a divorce to be obtained by the Duke, and of my marrying her; no very bad speculation, as she possesses so large a fortune in her own right, which would be very convenient in the embarrassed state of my affairs. But *now*, when satiety has taken the place of affection, when her remorse, as she calls her blue devils, has broken her spirits, and made her a Niobe, always in tears, not thrice her fortune, large as it is, would tempt me to live with her. No, no, I am too well acquainted with the sufferings of poor Chattingham, who married the divorced Lady Alicia Evelyn, who has, ever since, been a Magdalen, weeping away her sins, and drowning his comfort in her tears. The world is more indulgent to male sinners than to females. It opens its *salons* to the first with a charity highly to be approved, while it rigidly excludes the second; that is, it is severe on the weak, as it always is, and kind to the strong. *The excluded*, left alone to reflect, feels it hard to bear that her *husband* should enjoy advantages from which she is debarred. If *he stays at* home with her, he becomes bored to death by her sad-

ness. If he goes into society, she feels herself ill-used. The consequence is, that, having deeply considered the question, I have too much reason to rejoice that the Duchess did not take advantage of my proposals to fly with me during the first passionate days of love, ever to incur the chance of incurring such a heavy penalty again. But, I must go to her. Ye Gods! how bored I shall be. Already do I feel an inclination to yawn in anticipation of the interview. I see her face spoiled by tears, as usual; hear her voice tremulous, and broken by sobs, and — but no, I must not dwell on the scene I have to encounter, or I shall lose courage to go."

"What has happened?" were nearly the first words that passed the lips of Lord Glastonbury, as he entered the *boudoir* of the Duchess of Glenallen, whom he found more pale and agitated than ever, and whose hand trembled violently in his when he took it.

"The Duke has discovered all. Oh! I am a lost, a degraded woman," was the reply.

"The devil he has! I always feared it would be so. You are so imprudent, so *exigeante*. You would make me come here much more frequently than was prudent, would insist on my never leaving you in public, and would not, in spite of all my advice, burn my letters. You may blame yourself for all the *esclandre* that will take place. The fault certainly was not mine."

"These reproaches are now as ill-timed, as they are unkind," replied the Duchess, her face becoming suffused with a deep red, and then turning pale as marble. "As well may you reproach me for having loved you too well."

"My dear friend, this is not a time for sentimentality," said Lord Glastonbury impatiently. "What do you intend to do? for that is now the question."

"Can you ask? Oh, what remains for me to do but to seek refuge with the only being who has not a right to reproach me, or to deny me protection?" and floods of tears coursed each other down the pale cheeks of the Duchess.

"You must be mad to think of such a step; and I should be *worse than mad not at once* to tell you that it is impossible, and *must not be thought of*," replied Lord Glastonbury; with a vehe-

mence that proved how firm was his resolution not to consent to the measure suggested by the agonized woman before him, who, terrified and shocked by his unusual sternness and violence of manner, sank into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. "You can go abroad until this *esclandre* is forgotten," resumed Lord Glastonbury; "you have, luckily for you, a large fortune, and that is a salve which heals the wounds inflicted on reputation so well, that after some years only slight scars remain. You can, after some time, come back and —"

"And you," interrupted the Duchess, her tears dried by the burning heat of her cheeks, "what do you mean to do? Am I to go forth alone to face a world whose contumely I have incurred by loving you to my own destruction?"

"Would you have me plunge you still deeper in a scrape?" demanded Lord Glastonbury. The Duchess shuddered at the mean and inappropriate word substituted for ruin. "Were you in a cooler mood to listen, I could give you a thousand incontrovertible reasons, many imperative with regard to myself, and most kindly meant with regard to you, why I must positively, now, and for ever, decline being the companion of your flight. If, as I suppose, you will be immediately driven from this house, let me advise you to go abroad. I will write to you often, and keep you *au fait* of all that is going on. Nay more, I will make an excursion to the continent during the recess from business, and spend a few days wherever you take up your abode."

While Lord Glastonbury was uttering this unfeeling speech, every word of which pierced the heart of the unfortunate woman to whom it was addressed, as if a dagger had stabbed her, she became sensible, for the first time, of the utter worthlessness of the man for whom she had sacrificed her honour, her peace, and the world's respect. To find, — and in her hour of need, — that he loved her not, — that he could contemplate their separation unmoved, — behold, nay counsel her exile from her native land, from that society whose idol she had been, until the consequences of her love for him had thrown her from the pedestal where she was wont to be worshipped, — to hear him designate the ruin of her reputation, of her peace, as a "scrape," was too much.

"Leave me!" said the tortured woman. "I will trouble you o more."

"Come, come, this is foolish. Do not think, that, because will not compromise you, and myself still more, by agreeing to our unwise, and, I really must say, absurd and preposterous plan f our living together, I am unmindful of your interest and happi- ess. I best prove my sincerity by firmly resisting your wishes on iis occasion. You are unhappy at this moment, it is very natural iat you should be so; but I, who am older, a great deal older, and ave more experience than you, my dear friend, know that all this orrow will pass away. Every strong passion does; their very in- ensity exhausts them. I remember when circumstances com- elled me to break off with my first love, I thought I should never iore know happiness, and for the first few weeks I *was* miserable. ut, after a time, I became reasonable; people always do, and o you will, my sweet friend."

How often had Lord Glastonbury declared to the Duchess, that e never had *really* loved before he knew her! how frequently worn, that no other woman had ever inflicted, or ever could in- ict a pang on his heart. The belief in the truth of these asser- ons had been one of the strongest motives for her affection; and ften had it been laid to her heart. To hear him now refer coolly o other loves, offer his own experience, to prove how easily the ounds of affection are healed and forgotten, was agony, was tor- ure to the unhappy woman. She trembled so violently, and ooked so death-like, that even her false lover began to apprehend hat *hers* was not a sorrow that could lightly pass away, — nay, ome fears for her reason, and her life, flashed on him, as he ooked on her agonized face. He would have taken her hand, but he waved him from her. "Leave me, I entreat you!" said she; 'I wish to be alone. I shall soon be better; but at present I must e alone."

"As you wish," was the reply; for, piqued by her command o withdraw, the pity that was awaking in his selfish heart, became uickly chilled. "You can write me a line, if I can be of use," dded he; *and the door closed* after him.

CHAPTER XLI.

It was long ere the Duchess of Glenallen moved from the spot, where she had sunk into a chair. When Lord Glastonbury left the room, Madame Fanchon, having heard of his visit, went to Selina, and, with every symptom of alarm in her countenance, inquired where the Duchess was. "I know dat Milor Glastonbury is gone some time. De groom of de chambres told me so; and I expected to find de Duchess here. Venever dat man come here of late she is always so sad after, dat I vant to be near her doe she not vish it. I have a dread of something, I know not vat. I will go to de *boudoir;* and you, Mademoiselle, come vid me, and stay at de door, and if I call, you come in directly."

Selina accompanied Madame Fanchon to the door of the *boudoir*, as she was told; but no sooner had the latter entered it, than she uttered a cry, and Selina rushed into the room. They found the Duchess perfectly insensible, in which state she had probably been for some time; and, for a few minutes, they believed her dead. Madame Fanchon uttered piercing shrieks, and, in her terror and grief, lost all power of being useful, while Selina rang the bell, sent instantly for the family physician, bathed the temples of her mistress with cold water, and used every other effort in her power to restore suspended animation. At length the Duchess revived. Her heart beat feebly beneath the hand of Selina; she sighed deeply, and opened her eyes. The joy of Madame Fanchon now became as wild and unmanageable, as her terror and grief had previously been; and Selina had great difficulty in making her comprehend, that positive quiet was absolutely necessary to the Duchess. "*Cher ange! cher ange!*" exclaimed the poor old woman, dropping on her knees, and pressing the hand of her mistress to her lips, and bathing it with her tears.

Though animation was restored, and a faint pink hue replaced the pallid one that had overspread the face of the Duchess, consciousness was not yet quite restored. She gazed around and looked at Madame Fanchon and Selina inquiringly, then re-

er hand to her brow, as if to collect her thoughts, and, after a nort pause, uttered a piercing cry; and again fainted.

The doctor soon after arrived, administered restoratives, and ıad her removed to her chamber, giving the strictest injunctions hat his patient should not, for a moment, be left alone. He nade various inquiries, as to the state of the Duchess previous o this sudden attack, — inquiries that proved to Selina that *he*, ike herself, was disposed to attribute it to some strong moral suffering, rather than to any physical cause. He remained with he Duchess until he saw her sink into a state of drowsiness, and was on the point of withdrawing, when the Duke of Glenallen entered the chamber.

"My God! doctor, what is all this?" said he, evidently in great alarm. "I but this moment entered from my drive, and heard that the Duchess had been taken suddenly ill."

"I really feel at a loss," replied the physician, "not with regard to the peculiar character of her Grace's malady, but to the origin. I should attribute it to some sudden moral shock, some deep grief — but that I hear nothing has occurred to occasion any such emotions."

The Duke turned pale, opened the curtain of the bed, gazed intently on the pallid, but still lovely, face of his wife, then, dropping the curtain gently, an expression of the greatest alarm overspreading his countenance, he whispered the doctor, who, in return, shook his head, and uttered a few words *sotto voce;* and then both retired to the next room, to continue the conversation.

"Ah! Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle, how fortunate it was dat my heart did visper me to go to de *boudoir*. *Mon Dieu! mon Dieu! sans cela*, she might be now gone from us for ever. She has de heart *trop chaud*, *trop fier;* and dat vill kill her von day. *Cher ange!* she vas not used to chagrin, only for a short time, vid dat *mechante*, Madame Vestern. Ah! dat voman vas de cause of all dis misery. If she not have tormented *cette chère creature* more dan nobody could bear, she never run avay to marry de *rusé* old Duke; and I vould not like von stupid *vieux* gobemouche, have *helped him to do it all*. But, *Dieu sait!* I did believe it

vas for de best, or I never lend myself in de affair; but oh! I now tink it vas all for de vorst."

Selina took her station by the bedside, determined not to leave it; and great difficulty had she to prevent the garrulous old Frenchwoman from talking, for, though passionately attached and devoted to the Duchess, Madame Fanchon was so given to talk, that she could hardly remain silent a minute. The Duke stole into the chamber every hour to see how his wife was; and so great was the anxiety pictured on his face, that Selina, although greatly prejudiced against him by the previous communications of Madame Fanchon, could not help pitying him. The old woman noticed this; and when he had withdrawn, after the fifth or sixth visit, shook her head, and whispered, "Ah, Mademoiselle, you are, like me, a *gobemouche*. You tink all dese visits are because he loves her. No, no; it is because he loves her fortune, and is afraid to lose it. *Mon Dieu!* ven von tink dat *cette belle créature* is not loved for *herself*, she dat has all to make her loved, it drive me mad. No, he tinks only of de money; and if he could keep dat, after her death, he vould be more glad dan sorry she should die. Oh! *c'est un vieux sans cœur, un égoïste.* You may believe me. Yet vonce he did so deceive me, dat I tought him de most kind, de most excellent of men, who only vished to marry Miladi Louise to take her from de power of dat odious Madame Vestern; and I did honour and esteem him for it. But ven I found out de truth, oh, *mon Dieu!* how I did hate and despise myself for having been such a *bête* as to tink vell of him."

And now the torpid state in which the unhappy Duchess had been for several hours plunged, changed into one of feverish excitement. She still slept, but her cheeks became flushed, and her hand burned. She spoke frequently, and the events that had occasioned the malady which now had seized her, occupied her mind even in the delirium that reigned over it. She raved of the dishonourable proposal of her husband, — of the heartless ingratitude of her lover. She called on death to release her from an existence now become insupportable, and on the Almighty for pardon for her sin. It was piteous to hear her incoherent ravings,

and mark the change in her late pale face. One moment she would, believing him present, address Lord Glastonbury by the most endearing epithets — deplore that they had met too late to be joined in holy wedlock before God and man; — ask him if he could still love her when shame had set its stigma on her brow, and all who once esteemed her turned away in horror and contempt from her approach? The next, she would recal their last interview, utter the most cutting reproaches, and accuse him of having destroyed her here and hereafter.

The Duke entered more than once during the time she was uttering these frantic ravings of delirium, and his cheek, albeit unused to flush, grew red as he listened to them.

"She is evidently under the influence of a brain fever, and knows not what she utters," observed he; "I must again send for the doctor."

"Ah! you know too vell dat she speak de terrible truth," said Madame Fanchon, when he left the chamber, "and you vill have to answer before de throne of de Almighty for de misery you have brought on dis poor *orpheline*."

The doctor now declared that the Duchess was, as her husband had stated, suffering from a brain fever, and he called in three other medical men, of eminence in their profession, to assist him with their opinions. For many days it was their belief that their patient must sink under the violence of her disease, and there were hours in which so total was the prostration of her strength, that Selina thought her life could not last through the day. She watched over her, with a tenderness not to be described, bathed her burning temples with iced water, and applied cooling draughts to her fevered lips. Affection and intelligence enabled her to perform the functions of a nurse in a manner that surprised, while it delighted all present, and the doctors declared that they had never previously met with so able and judicious an assistant as in her. The Duke, whose anxiety won him the esteem of the physicians, repeatedly thanked Selina for her unceasing care of the Duchess; and the attached Madame Fanchon admitted that her skill as a nurse was far excelled by that of Selina.

"I not tink," would she say, "dat any Engelishe woman have

such a power of endurance. She never tires, never vants to sleep, never complains, but dere she sits vid her eyes fixed on ce cher ange, and so still dat she never is heard to breathe, and if any ting is vanted, she glides about de room like a spirit vidout being heard to move. I do believe it is all because she speak so leetle. If she has any toughts, dey are all shut up in her heart, for she never lets dem out, and so she is not like me *fatiguée* from talking. It is de vay vid de Engelishe. Dey have not, like de French, fresh toughts coming into deir minds every minute, vich forces dem to speak de old toughts to give room for de new. No, dey have not de *esprit* like de French; if dey had, dey would be obliged to talk, as I do, and dat would *fatiguer* dem."

Such was the way in which the *amour propre* of Madame Fanchon accounted for the devoted and never-tiring zeal of Selina in the sick room, and in which she satisfactorily, to herself at least, explained her own incapability to fulfil the office of nurse as Selina did.

Those only who have watched by the couch of one dear to them, during a malady that threatens, every moment, to snatch to the grave the object of their care, can be aware how, under such trying circumstances, affection and interest become tenfold increased, — and how the life of the anxious watcher seems to hang on that of the poor helpless creature struggling between life and death before her.

"How providential, O Almighty God," would Selina say to herself in the stillness of night, "are thy decrees. Thou who hast, by filling my heart with tenderness for this Thy suffering and erring creature, rendered that a labour of love, which Thy mercy has enabled me to support, but which, with less affection for her, I might have lacked zeal, ability, or strength to fulfil. Grant, O merciful God, that she may be spared to mourn, and atone for her sin, and so live for the future, to Thy honour and her own salvation."

At length a favourable change took place in the health of the *Duchess*, but not until she was reduced almost to a shadow, and so weak as to be helpless as an infant. Slow was her approach to convalescence, but it was marked by a patience and gentleness

that indicated a great change in her character. No longer did she pray for the death which she now felt she was unfit to meet. She evinced gratitude to all who had contributed towards rescuing her from danger, but, most of all, to Him who had vouchsafed to open her eyes to her own errors and to lead her to seek to atone for them. Towards Selina she showed a sentiment of affection, which proved that, even while supposed to be unconscious of all that was passing around her, she was sensible of her tender and watchful care.

When able to leave her sick chamber, the Duchess declared her intention of retiring for some months to a seat of hers in a distant county. Her physicians approved the scheme, and persons were despatched to render the mansion fit for her reception. Before she left town, she had a long and touching conversation with the Duke, in which she censured her own past conduct so severely, and dealt so mercifully with his, that even his selfish nature was melted, and he asked her forgiveness for having ever wounded her feelings, and promised never again to occasion her a moment's pain. They parted amicably, the Duchess appropriating a considerable portion of her large income to his use, and determined henceforth to make a better use of the wealth bestowed by providence on her, than she had ever hitherto done.

No longer treated as a domestic but as a friend, Selina now became the constant and useful companion of the Duchess. She read to her, and drew her attention to works calculated to strengthen her mind, instead of exciting her imagination. "The Book of Books, The Holy Bible," was every day opened, and in its sacred pages the wounded heart and tortured conscience of the Duchess found a balm. She soon learned to be thankful for the events that had, while nearly depriving her of life, awakened her to a deep sense of her own unworthiness, and of gratitude to God for his mercy. She frequently wrote to her husband, to exhort him to turn his thoughts from this sinful world, on the pleasures of which he had allowed them too long to be engrossed, and to prepare for that better life, to which by repentance he might still aspire. The answers of the Duke, though polite, and even affectionate, held out little hope to his wife that her appeals to his

conscience had the desired effect. Nevertheless, a sense of duty led her to continue to exhort him, and, when informed some months after, that he was seized with a dangerous illness, she instantly left her tranquil abode, and returned to his habitation to administer to his comfort. She watched over him, as a duteous daughter would have done to a father. She prayed for him, and even won him to join with her in prayer. His death-bed, if not all that could be desired by one whose whole thoughts were now turned to another world, was not such as could deprive her of the soothing hope that he had benefited by her counsel, and profited by her prayers. He died, thanking her for her care, after having at her request, several times seen a worthy clergyman, and manifested an earnest attention to the spiritual comfort he administered, when all other views faded away.

There had been a time when the Duchess would have rejoiced in her release from the chain that had bound her to a husband so every way unsuited to her; but that time was passed. Ever since the illness which had brought her to the verge of the grave, she had learned to view her own conduct with such sorrow and repentance, that she had become indulgent for his, and grateful that he had not exposed her error and sin to the world. In vain did Madame Fanchon, with less charity, endeavour to persuade the Duchess that the Duke's forbearance originated in a less worthy motive than that which she attributed to it. The elevated mind of her mistress not being prone to detect vice, to which it was a stranger, she remembered only the good derived from her husband's silence, and was not disposed to be ungrateful for it. The truth was, the danger in which her life had been placed had so alarmed the Duke, that believing her illness to have been occasioned by the communication he had ventured on in the interview that had preceded it, and which had so strongly excited her, he not only regretted the dishonourable conduct of which he had been guilty, but determined henceforth never to refer to it.

Her deep emotion on that occasion had revealed to him how much of what was noble and good still filled her heart. He remembered how blamable his own conduct towards her had been; how he had left her, when little more than a child, exposed to the

dangers that must ever await a young and beautiful woman, with no husband to protect, no friend to counsel her, and his better nature, so long shut in by the thick envelope of selfishness that encased it, was awakened to a deep sense of pity for her, and blame to himself. Her generosity towards him previously to her retiring to the country, achieved her triumph over his newly-awakened sense of right; and had his life been prolonged, the Duchess would have found in him a true friend, anxious for her happiness, though incapable of forming it. The Duchess returned to her seclusion, and recommenced the life of study, broken in upon only by works of good, that had filled up her time before she went to London to attend her dying husband. She established schools, built an hospital, and large alms-houses, to be supported solely at her expense. She visited and relieved the poor, comforted the unhappy, encouraged the deserving, and sought to reclaim the erring.

Before three months of her widowhood had expired, a letter from Lord Glastonbury reached her. He had left England the day after their last interview, fearful that some *esclandre* which might compromise his personal interests would take place. He looked on the Duchess as little less than insane, and capable of not only destroying her own position for ever, but of compromising his. To escape any future scenes, as he termed it, or any *exposé*, he went off to the continent, where pleasure had detained him, until he read in the newspaper the death of the Duke of Glenallen. This event produced serious reflections in his worldly and unfeeling mind. The Duchess, now free to dispose of her hand and vast fortune, had become a very different person to the wife whose husband might any day have exposed her, and compromised her lover. Her sin had not been revealed to the world. She had not lost caste, so he could by wedding her secure to himself the wealthiest heiress in England, a woman too, so beautiful as to preclude the possibility of the man on whom she bestowed her hand being accused of mercenary motives; and standing in so high a position in society as to reflect, rather than receive distinction, on whomsoever she might marry.

"And of this *bonne fortune* I am sure," said Lord Glastonbury to himself; "I am the only man she ever loved, ever committed

herself with. She will be but too happy to redeem the only sin of her life by a marriage with the partner of it. I can persuade her that I left England wholly to save her reputation; that my sternness at our last interview was only assumed to prevent her ruin; and never did I love her so fondly, nor give her such an undeniable proof of my attachment, as when I declined to accept the sacrifice she was anxious to make, of flying with me. Women are so credulous, so prone to believe every assertion made by a man they love, that I feel certain she will receive all my explanations with perfect confidence, and I shall bear off a prize, of which every marrying man in England will envy me the possession. I am on the whole a devilish lucky dog, and now rejoice that Lady Julia Mordaunt did not accept my offer at Paris. Her fortune is not above one quarter the amount of the Duchess's, her person not to be compared, and she is ten years older. Yes, I am a lucky fellow!"

It was after indulging a train of reflections like the above quoted, that Lord Glastonbury wrote a proposal of marriage to the Duchess of Glenallen. The letter was an artful one. It referred, but with the tact of an experienced man of the world, to their former attachment, and his desire that the only error of an otherwise spotless life should be effaced by a marriage that would redeem and sanctify it. He painted his unchanged passion in glowing colours, and his impatience to throw himself at the feet of the object of it, from which he was only deterred by the dread of compromising, in the slightest degree, her whom he hoped, when the required time for widowhood had passed away, he should lead to the hymeneal altar.

Never had the Duchess felt so indignant as after the perusal of this letter. The blood mounted to her very temples, and her lips trembled.

"And this is the man for whom I sinned! for whom I have for ever lost my own respect," exclaimed she; "oh! it needed not this fresh exposure of his unworthiness to humble me in my own eyes, to renew that repentance for my guilt which no time can efface. Wed him! No, not for worlds! not to buy even the concealment of my sin. Deeply as I deplore, and must ever lament it, and desirous as I am to bury it in oblivion from the world, rather

would I brave the worst, — his revelation of it, and the scorn of society, than become his wife."

Her answer to his letter astonished almost as much as it enraged him. Incapable of comprehending or of appreciating a character like hers, he instantly came to the conclusion that some new attachment on her part could alone have led to her rejection of him. Under this impression he wrote to her again, insinuating rather than openly menacing, that if she ever consented to wed another, he would reveal her former *liaison* with him.

"How little does he know me," said the Duchess to herself, "if he believes me capable of deceiving any man who might address me as a suitor. No, never again will I marry."

CHAPTER XLII.

It was some time before the Duchess recovered her ordinary state of composure, so cruelly broken in upon by the heartless and indelicate letters of Lord Glastonbury, These new proofs of the baseness of the man she had once so sinfully loved, overwhelmed her with shame, and increased her contrition; a contrition so deep and sincere, that she deemed a long life of repentance would not be sufficient to redeem her sin. Every hour of her life was passed in doing good, or in reading and reflection; and when Selina looked on this beautiful woman, not yet more than two-and-twenty years old, possessed of boundless wealth, descended from one of the noblest houses, holding such an elevated rank, and sought after by the highest and proudest, thus devoting her youth to the amelioration of the condition of the poor, and to penitence for one sin, a sin unknown to the world, she could almost have wept that one so naturally prone to good, should have been, by the force of circumstances, hurried into a crime, the sense of which deprived her of that happiness, which her personal and mental attractions, no less than her position, might have secured her.

The seclusion in which the Duchess of Glenallen lived, did not preclude her from the addresses of many of her former admirers. It is true, they did not, like Lord Glastonbury, presume to write

to her until a year had elapsed after the death of the Duke. Many of these suitors were in every way unexceptionable; and all had enjoyed opportunities of knowing and appreciating her whose hand they were anxious to gain. The Duchess never hesitated a moment in declining their proposals, persisting in her resolution never again to marry. Many were the visits offered by former female friends, with sons, brothers, or nephews, for whom they longed to win the prize; but delicate health was pleaded as an excuse for refusing all visits, and at length the beautiful recluse, as it now became the fashion to call her, was left to enjoy in peace the solitude she preferred; her interested friends and admirers piqued into accusing her of eccentricity or affectation. This was the happiest period of the life of Selina, and would have left her nothing to desire, could she but have seen her beloved mistress less haunted and pained by the memory of the past. Treated more as a friend than a dependent, she learned to know the fine qualities of the Duchess, and with this knowledge her affection and devotion to her increased.

Months rolled away tranquilly, the Duchess pursuing the even tenour of her way, dispensing happiness around her, and almost worshipped by all who had opportunities of judging her. Never was her name mentioned in any cottage, for miles and miles in her neighbourhood, that blessings did not follow it; and never did she lay her head on her pillow, without knowing that she had, during the preceding day, conferred benefits on all requiring her aid. Yet still the happiness diffused by her to others brought not that boon to herself; one fatal remembrance poisoned her existence, and embittered every hour of it.

And now a great change became apparent in the Duchess of Glenallen. Her health, which had continued delicate ever since her severe illness, began to betray such unequivocal symptoms of decay, as to seriously alarm Selina, and plunge Madame Fanchon into despair. A hectic cough, pain in the side, universal lassitude, and sleepless nights, too surely announced that remorse and grief had impaired, if not wholly destroyed her constitution.

"Ah! Mademoiselle, Mademoiselle," would Madame Fanchon

say, "*ce cher ange* will soon leave us, will become *un ange au ciel*, unless we can persuade her to go to London, and have a consultation of physicians. It break my heart to see her vid dat bright pink spot on her cheek, and her beautiful eyes so much more brilliant dan ven she vas in health. Vell did I know dat if ever she did vat vas wrong, she never could be happy any more. De vorld might pardon, but she vouldn't forgive herself. She believed dat her love for dat bad man vas to be almost excused by his goodness; and she judging him by her own noble heart, tought him perfect. It vas dis belief dat supported her against de stings of remorse, ven she tought he adored her; for even den dere vere times ven she vas so *malheureuse* dat I trembled lest she should go to de Duke and tell him all. But ven she found him so *ingrat*, so base, her sin did appear so moche de vorse in her own eyes, dat she no longer had courage to struggle against de regret dat has consumed her, for having lost her own esteem. Dere be dose, Mademoiselle, and de Duchesse is von of dem, who have de heart so noble, so fine, dat ven dey have lost deir own respect, dey cannot ever more have von moment's peace or health, and vont to be proud of de man for whom dey have lost it, and to believe dat *he* at least values de terrible sacrifice dat dey have made. But ven even dis belief is gone, and dat every excuse to satisfy deir own wounded conscience has fallen avay, den, oh! den, Mademoiselle, de proud heart break, de health goes, and dey die."

Often was Selina reminded of the last days of Lady Almondbury, as she contemplated the changed aspect of the Duchess — the same attenuated form, the same faded, yet still lovely face. A conviction of her danger had taken possession of the Duchess's mind, and its effect was a more constant attention to her religious duties, and a greater composure of spirits. Madame Fanchon urged her mistress daily to go to London for medical advice.

"It will be of no use my good Fanchon," would she answer; "I feel that my days are numbered, and wish to end them tranquilly here."

At length her repeated entreaties induced the Duchess to consent to go to London.

"*Poor old faithful* creature!" observed her Grace to Selina;

"although I know how useless it is, and dislike the fatigue of the journey, and leaving this quiet spot, I cannot refuse a request of hers, so continually urged."

The journey was undertaken; propped by pillows the invalid reclined in her carriage, Selina and Fanchon seated opposite to her; nor when they reached the railway, would she quit it, so much did she dread encountering the additional move, or meeting strangers. The coach — a roomy and commodious landau — was the last of the train, and immediately before it, was a box containing horses; they had only proceeded a short way when the movement of the carriage became so violent and unsteady, that its three occupants were filled with alarm. Something must be wrong, they felt persuaded; and, in a terror not to be described, they clung to the holders to avoid being dashed against each other. Selina looked out of the window, and screamed, to attract attention, but her cries were drowned in the stunning noise of the train, and the large vehicle, filled with horses, in front completely masked them from the carriages that preceded it. Every moment the movement of the coach grew more violent; and it now became evident to those within it, that the braces on one side had given way, for the body of the carriage was whirled on its side, half over the truck. The imperial, partly unfastened, swung from side to side as the coach, impelled along with a fearful velocity, was threatened every moment to be shattered to pieces. The Duchess, thrown on the lower side, soon became insensible; Selina and Fanchon offered up prayers, deeming that all hope of mortal aid was now over, when, on entering a tunnel, the half-prostrate carriage was dashed with such violence against the side of the arch, that it was wholly disengaged from the truck, and shattered to pieces. Selina lost all consciousness the moment this occurred, and when restored to animation, found herself in a room, surrounded by half-a-dozen persons, who had all been occupied about her. For several minutes she could not remember what had happened, but gazed on the strangers in surprise. By degrees she became aware of her situation, and in alarm called for the Duchess — for Fanchon. Instead of her agonized inquiries being answered, she was told

she must not speak; that she must continue perfectly quiet; and then she became sensible of great pain in her head, and in several parts of her person. She had been placed on a bench, near an open window, at one of the stations; and while she lay there, overcome by bodily torture and terror, the inquiries, unanswered by those around her, were solved by the conversation carried on outside the window. "We saw the coach thrown on one side," said the speaker, "and expected it would be dashed to pieces. We were on the bridge, and shouted, and ran with all our might, but, Lord bless you! what chance had we of overtaking the train that rushed madly on, as if the devil himself was driving it! or of our voices being heard, when that shrieking, puffing engine drowns every other sound. Oh, it was a terrible sight! And then, when we saw the train going to enter the tunnel, we knew it must all soon be over with the coach, which was overhanging on the right side of the truck, and sure enough, it was dashed up against the arch, and fell to pieces in a moment. In the shock it was disengaged from the truck. We shouted for assistance, and ran to the carriage. Oh, what a frightful sight it was to see! One of the women, they say it was the mistress, was quite dead. A piece of the wood of the carriage had struck her on the temple, and the blood had streamed all over her. Her death, they say, must have been instantaneous. The old woman opened her eyes once, looked at the dead lady, groaned, and never moved afterwards, although the doctors tried all their skill with both. The other young woman got a bad cut on the back of the head, and is dreadfully bruised, but they say she may recover. 'T was lucky for her that the train stopped at this station, for there was no less than two doctors travelling by it, and they have been doing all they can for the poor young creature."

Selina listened with intense interest to the recapitulation of the fearful scene, in which she had taken a part, her eyes closed, as if to shut it out from her sight, and, as it concluded, she uttered a piercing shriek, and again relapsed into insensibility. For many days her life was in the utmost danger, and she was wholly unconscious *of everything* passing around her.

During that time a coroner's inquest had taken place, and the last mournful duties were performed to the dead.

Youth, and a good constitution, had enabled the poor sufferer to survive the injuries she had sustained, and the violent fever that had followed them; and when restored to convalescence, she found the kind-hearted Mrs. Steadfast watching by her bed. The husband of that worthy woman having read in the newspaper the details of the frightful catastrophe, had despatched her to take charge of Selina; and she had been many days with her before the invalid was aware of the fact. Her presence, and soothing attention, produced the most favourable effect. The state of bodily weakness, too, to which Selina was reduced, left her a passive, rather than a violent mourner, for the mistress she had learned to love so fondly, and the good-natured, poor Fanchon, from whom she had experienced nothing but kindness ever since she had known her. She would remain for hours lost in thought, questioning herself whether it could indeed be true, that the lovely being whose sweet voice still lingered in her ear, whose gentleness and considerate kindness had been evinced in a thousand nameless, but touching ways, ever since she had entered her abode, was gone for ever; and sincere and deep was the grief of Selina. Many were the tears shed by her as her thoughts dwelt on the terrible catastrophe that had deprived her of the best, the gentlest of mistresses. Although deeply grateful to the Almighty for the preservation of her own life, she could not be consoled for the loss of her mistress; and her sorrow, though not loud and boisterous, became a settled sentiment in her breast, the effect of which greatly retarded her recovery.

The mortal remains of the Duchess and her faithful old servant Fanchon had been removed for interment in the church adjoining her late abode, while Selina had been struggling between life and death in a brain fever. Frequently did the poor girl revert to the last time she had seen her, pale as marble, in a deep swoon, wholly insensible of what was passing around her. The frantic cries of poor Fanchon, the terrible velocity of the movement of the vehicle that contained all three, until the final crash,

were remembered as a fearful but vivid dream that haunted her. And now — all was over.

Again she was houseless. Her beautiful, her good mistress was gone, she humbly hoped, to that Heaven to which her deep and never-ceasing remorse for the one sin of her young life had entitled her. Yes, penitence so sincere must plead for her before her Almighty and merciful Father; and this confidence in the bliss she was now enjoying became the only source of consolation to Selina.

When able to be removed she accompanied Mrs. Steadfast to London, and in a few days after despatched a note announcing her arrival to Mrs. Fraser. In her present state she longed to see that amiable and gentle being, and was not without a hope that she might again enter into her establishment, so warmly had that lady pressed her to do so when she had last seen her. The note was brought back by the messenger, with the intelligence that Mrs. Fraser, with her mother and sisters, had gone abroad, and were not expected back to England for a year. This news inflicted a severe disappointment on Selina, for she had counted much on receiving comfort from her for whom she entertained so sincere a regard.

Mrs. Steadfast, alarmed by the continued weakness of Selina, called in a skilful physician, who, made acquainted with the recent affliction she had experienced, advised to have her removed to a milder climate, which, with a total change of scene, he thought would be the most effectual means for her restoration to health.

But how is this advice to be carried into effect? thought the excellent couple, under whose roof Selina was sojourning.

"Let us wait, my dear, until she gets a little better," said Mrs. Steadfast to her husband, "and we may hear of some lady going abroad, and requiring an attendant. I often read in the newspaper inquiries of this nature."

"In the meanwhile," replied her husband, "we must manage to get *Miss Stratford into the* fresh air as much as possible. Our *son is such a good steady* lad, and drives so carefully, that he

can take her out for a couple of hours every day in our gig, and that will set her up."

This kind plan was carried into execution, and in the course of a few weeks the glow of health, which revisited the cheeks of Selina, and her returning strength, proclaimed how judicious and advantageous it had proved. Yet returning health did not restore her broken spirits; and as her kind host and hostess marked this, they bethought themselves of the physician's advice of change of scenery to divert the invalid's mind from the painful topic that unceasingly filled it. They inquired among their friends; looked into the advertisements in the newspapers, and at length found one that seemed likely to suit their young friend.

"A lady of distinction," so stated the advertisement, "about to visit the continent, requires a young person of good education to fill the place of *femme de chambre*. She will be expected to read aloud to her mistress, to act occasionally as her amanuensis, and to keep her accounts."

"Why it seems the very thing, my dear," observed Mr. Steadfast. "How very few *femmes de chambres* could be able to fill this double capacity, and Miss Stratford happens to be precisely one of the few."

"Yes, she is indeed, and I trust she may be engaged," said his wife.

The advertisement was answered, and appointment made, and Selina, in consequence, waited on the Lady Caldersfoot. The house was one of small dimensions, but of great pretension, situated in Wilton Place. The hall was covered with plaster brackets, on which stood innumerable diminutive casts of the most celebrated works of antiquity. The staircase was decorated in a similar style; and in the drawing-room, into which she was ushered by a footman in a livery more remarkable for gaudiness than good taste, the walls were nearly hidden by a number of pictures, so execrably bad, that the eye of Selina, lately accustomed to look on works by the best masters, turned from them with surprise, and a conviction that the taste and knowledge of their owner must indeed be very defective. To the frames of *these* vile daubs were affixed the names of the most remarkable

painters, to whose style and manner they did not present even the slightest resemblance. They had not even the merit of being bad copies of the masters. Coarse Dutch furniture, painted brown, and picked out in gold, as the dealers term it, next attracted her attention; the chairs and sofas covered with stamped cotton velvet. The curtains were, as upholsterers say, to match, and the table-covers of the same material. Mirrors, of small dimensions, in brown and gilt frames, decorated the room. On the mantelpiece and tables were placed various articles of China, of a quality that would have thrown the author of Vatheck into a fever, such wretched specimens were they, mixed with a quantity of trumpery, the refuse of cheap *bric-à-brac* shops, but which were labelled as the productions of Benvenuto Cellini, and the masters of his time. German glasses, of fantastic forms, were marked as *crystal de roche;* and old metal boxes incrusted with false stones, that could not impose on any one for the real, were placed under glass shades; as if things of some value. A few very ill-painted miniatures were scattered around the tables; and a gaudy carpet, of so thin a substance as to betray the forms of the boards of the floor beneath it, completed the *ensemble* of the room in which Selina was left some twenty minutes before Lady Caldersfoot made her appearance. A striking similarity between the room and the owner instantly struck Selina, for in both brown and gilding predominated. The lady herself, of a brown colour, was attired in brown silk, not remarkable for its freshness. Her curls — and they were evidently only hers by right of purchase — were brown; and chains and bracelets, of what, in modern advertising phraseology, is termed mosaic gold, completed the costume of a most remarkably ill-looking old lady.

"Ah, Miss Stratford!" said she, examining Selina through her eye-glass; "I believe I am right, your name *is* Miss Stratford." Selina bowed assent. "Let us go into my library. I never feel so comfortable anywhere else;" and she led the way to a room that opened into the drawing-room. "Pray be seated."

The library, as it was termed, was a large closet, lined with book-shelves, on which stood, ranged in goodly show, rows of half-bound novels and periodicals. Nothing could be more mere-

tricious, or in worse taste than this room; the hangings, the chairs, and sofas, crowded into it, leaving hardly space to move, were o the most ill-assorted colours; the window-panes were pasted over with gaudy-coloured paper, in imitation of stained glass, and the table was littered with inkstands, presented, as Lady Caldersfoot took care to inform Selina, by the greatest men of our time, in recognition of her talents, and in gratitude for the delight and instruction their exercise had afforded them. Selina could not help remarking, that, if the good-will of the donors of these gifts was to be estimated by their beauty or value, it could not be very great, for the inkstands were mere trumpery, such as may be found at any of the cheap repositories for modern antiques.

"Of course, you know my writings?" said Lady Caldersfoot.

"I have not that pleasure, Madam," replied Selina. "Hitherto my reading has not included works of fiction."

"How very strange! I had thought that a person could not have been found in this country, or, indeed, in Europe, unacquainted with my writings. Of course, you have heard of my literary reputation?"

Selina again bowed an assent, for which her conscience reproached her, but which prudence exacted; for, short as had been her acquaintance with Lady Caldersfoot, she had seen enough of her to be aware, that, to confess the fact of never having heard of her Ladyship's fame, would be deemed nothing short of an offence of deep dye.

"Fame, as the divine Dante says, Miss Stratford, is not to be lightly won. Mine has been purchased at the cost of health. Nightly vigils, passed in poring over the works of philosophers and sages, and days spent in giving to the world the fruits of my studies, after their passing through the alembic of my mind, have impaired my health. The old story, the sword has worn out the scabbard; and I must seek a more genial clime to renovate my frame. You speak French and Italian fluently, I suppose?"

"Tolerably, Madam."

"You write a legible hand, I know, by your answer to my advertisement. Your appearance proves a superiority over the ordi-

nary class of persons offering themselves as *femmes de chambres*, and this peculiarity suits me; for, such is my respect for literature, that I think no lady, devoting herself to that noble profession, should have her person approached by a mere menial. Her hand-maiden should be a person of refinement, of education, capable of comprehending the elevated thoughts and lofty aspirations she may be called on to copy on paper."

Selina listened with surprise to this exordium, delivered with an affectation of manner that rendered it perfectly ludicrous.

"What are your terms, Miss Stratford?"

"Forty pounds was the sum I received in both my last situations."

"That is a great deal; but I suppose the ladies you were with, were not literary, had not, like me, achieved fame, consequently you had a right, where no lustre could be reflected on you, to receive a higher remuneration for your services. With me it will be wholly different: a portion of my celebrity will extend to you; and, therefore, you will not think me unreasonable, if, instead of forty, I offer you twenty-five pounds, which sum I never exceed. Indeed, I could find many young persons, who, for the sake of approaching my person, would gladly come without any salary; but I prefer you."

Amused by the absurdity and pretensions of the lady, Selina felt disposed to accept the terms offered. To go to a new scene, and a better climate, were strong inducements, in her present weak health and depressed spirits; so she acceeded.

"With whom did you last live?" inquired Lady Caldersfoot.

"With the Duchess of Glenallen," replied Selina; and tears filled her eyes as she uttered the name.

"What! the beautiful Duchess of Glenallen, who met such a fearful death some weeks ago?"

"The same, Madam."

"And you were the young person so miraculously saved? Why, the whole thing was one of the most remarkable, most tragical catastrophes in modern times. Not that such accidents are not common enough in our days; but a Duchess, a young, a beautiful, and a rich Duchess, who had retired from the world, rejected

suitors by dozens, and all on account of grief for the death of a very dissolute man, old enough to be her grandfather, makes all the difference; it changes the whole thing. I was really thinking of turning the event to account, of writing a novel, to be entitled, 'The Inconsolable; or, the Railroad Disaster.' I had even traced out a few sketches in my note-book. I had described the last scene, when, conscious of her impending destruction, she cried out, 'My beloved, I come to thee!' Yes, I shall be delighted to have you, for you can of course give me every particular, and then I can idealize the whole. Mere facts are nothing, everything must be placed in a romantic, a dramatic point of view; and in effecting this I shine."

Selina's astonishment was so great, that it revealed itself in her countenance, and Lady Caldersfoot, observing it, said, "I see you are surprised. This is because you have not lived with persons of genius. They seize, and make their own, all that can be worked up into books, and do it so admirably, that even those, who enacted the *rôles* they describe, can hardly detect them when they peruse the work. Glorious attribute of genius! that can invest common, or even painful circumstances, with an interest that it only can create."

The engagement was made, the reference to Mrs. Steadfast was found satisfactory, and Selina entered her new situation three days after.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THREE days after Selina entered the establishment of Lady Caldersfoot, that lady, attended by her and a man-servant, left Wilton Place for the Continent; which event, the evening previous to their departure, was notified by her Ladyship's own pen in the following terms, and despatched to a fashionable morning paper for insertion.

"Among the recent departures from town we have to announce that of the Lady Caldersfoot and suite, who left her Ladyship's elegant and classic residence in Wilton Place this day, *en route* for the Continent. It is said, we know not with what truth, that this

celebrated authoress and charming lady will occupy her graphic pen on a work of great importance, connected with the progress of literature and the fine arts in France and Italy, which no person is so capable of tracing as her Ladyship, whose profound knowledge and exquisite taste, as well as deep erudition, peculiarly fit her for the task. The distinguished *literati* in all the capitals through which this celebrated lady will pass, will no doubt eagerly seize the opportunity afforded them of offering their homage to the English Corinne."

Instructions were left, that several copies of the paper were to be forwarded to Paris after her Ladyship, in order, as she explained to Selina, that publicity should be given to her movements in other countries as well as in her own.

Arrived at Dover, Lady Caldersfoot proceeded to the Ship Inn, where she instantly summoned the proprietor to her presence.

"Pray, Sir," said she, "is the Governor at present at the Castle?"

"No, Madam, he left yesterday morning for town."

"How very unfortunate; but it is all my own fault. I should have apprised him that I was coming, and then he would have taken care not to be out of the way."

The innkeeper looked at her Ladyship with surprise, for neither her own appearance, nor that of her carriage or servant, had impressed him with a very high opinion of her grandeur.

"It may be as well, Sir," resumed the lady, "that you inform the civil and military authorities here of my arrival. They probably may wish to mark their respect by some of those attentions usually paid to persons of distinction, and might feel hurt if left in ignorance of my being here."

"Who shall I say, Madam?" inquired her host.

"The Lady Caldersfoot. Of course you know my name."

"I can't say, I do, your Ladyship; but so many lords and ladies pass through here, that I can't remember names."

"Do you never read, Sir?"

"Oh! yes, your Ladyship, the newspapers. I hav'n't time *for anything more.*"

"But, surely, in the newspapers you must have seen reviews of my works, or extracts taken from the evening papers."

"Perhaps, my lady, I may, but as I did not know your Ladyship's name, I can't be certain."

"I am Lady Caldersfoot, and my celebrity, has, I believe, I may say, become European."

"I make no doubt, your Ladyship."

"Will you order your best room to be prepared for me? People will be hereafter, if not at present, curious to see the room and bed I slept in. A day may come when fragments of the curtains of the bed in which I have reposed, will be purchased, as those of Voltaire's at Ferney have been." The innkeeper looked confounded. "Send my domestic," continued Lady Caldersfoot, "and have a roast chicken and half a pint of Sherry served up for my dinner. If my arrival here becomes generally known, many persons will doubtless apply for my autographs; this generally occurs wherever I go, and as I do not like to refuse, you may be the medium of applying for them; and now you may withdraw;" which Mr. Boniface did, evidently not a little puzzled what to make of his strange guest.

Thomas Whitlecombe, the footman, now made his appearance, bowing and pulling the forelock of his hair. Thomas was a new servant, having been sent up from one of the provinces only ten days before, and was as little skilled in the usages of a London footman as in knowledge of the world. He believed his mistress to be a very great lady, whose orders he must strictly obey, and he was utterly incapable of judging the propriety or absurdity of them.

"Thomas," said Lady Caldersfoot, "I am now going to a foreign land, and, to spare disagreeable comments, it will be necessary for you to change your name from the rustic one of Thomas to Theodore. Both names begin with a T, so that the mark on your clothes need not be altered. Remember, therefore, that from this day forth you are to answer only to the name of Theodore."

"But please your Ladyship, if how be as I was taken up for going by a false name? I have heard it is against the law."

"No, there is not the least danger of that, so you need not be alarmed. And, now, mind what I say. When you go down stairs, be particular in talking of me as much as possible in the servants' room, or in the tap."

"Oh! my Lady, would that be right? Why, if your Ladyship will believe me, I was almost agoing to blow up two chaps and a couple of women-servants in the room down stairs, for talking of their masters and mistresses. Lord bless us, what things they did say!"

"You mistake my instructions, Theodore. I don't mean you to talk as they did."

"God forbid, my Lady; for I wouldn't do such a thing for all the world."

"No, Theodore, you are merely to say that you have the honour of serving the most celebrated lady in England, the greatest authoress."

"And if I may make bold to ask, what is an hauthoress, your Ladyship?"

"A lady who writes books, and instructs the world. You are to say that in London all eyes are turned on your mistress; that the most costly gifts are sent to her by those delighted with her writings, and that publishers buy them at the greatest prices."

"I 've been a thinking, your Ladyship, that if you 'd write down all you have told me to say, in large writing, I 'd have it cried by the town-crier; he 'd do it for a couple of shillings, and that would make it known better than all I could say, for I 've not got a good memory for remembering hard words, or saying much at a time."

"*Quelle bête!*" muttered the lady, while Selina felt the greatest difficulty to avoid smiling. "No, no, Theodore, the town-crier must not be thought of; but it is positively necessary that you make all the persons you meet, know that your mistress is a grand lady and a great authoress."

"Dang it all," said Thomas, scratching his head, "I wish I may be able to remember that word hau-hauthoress. If it was put down in a plain hand, I 'd learn it by heart, so I would."

"Print it for him, Miss Stratford."

Selina did as she was told, and Theodore, as he was henceforth to be called, retired, spelling over as he withdrew, the word written down for him.

"And now you had better go and see my room arranged," said Lady Caldersfoot, "you can inform the landlady or housemaid, or both, who I am. When persons of celebrity like me, travel, every one is curious to learn something about them. I have ordered a chicken for my dinner; half of it will be quite sufficient for me, and the other half I will leave for you. This will save money, so come down in about a quarter of an hour after my dinner is served; I will then have finished, and you can take my place, and as I shall order a dumb waiter instead of a living one, nobody will be the wiser, and I shall have only one dinner to pay for instead of two."

The meanness of this proceeding was so extremely disagreeable to Selina, that she would have preferred going without a dinner to adopting it; but she saw that Lady Caldersfoot was not a woman to be reasoned with, — and, what was more, that she would resent any remonstrance. One part, however, of her Ladyship's instructions Selina did not comply with, namely, she did not enlighten either the hostess or the chamber-maid on the celebrity of Lady Caldersfoot, although the former threw herself in her way with an evident curiosity, probably excited by the communication made to her by her husband after his interview with the lady.

"How many is the table to be laid for, Madam?" inquired the quick, bustling waiter, who, with a table-cloth and napkin in one hand, and a knife-tray in the other, entered the room.

"For one only; and, as I don't like attendance at dinner, place a dumb waiter near my chair."

The waiter obeyed the order, and in due time the roast chicken was served. Whether Lady Caldersfoot's appetite was more than usually keen, or that the chicken was unusually small, cannot be well explained; but the result was, that so slender a portion of the carcass was left for Selina, the legs and wings having totally disappeared, that a bird, however delicate, would have been exposed to no danger from repletion had he picked it.

"Don't use a plate, the dish will serve as well, and prevent observation," said Lady Caldersfoot. "Sit down in my chair, and I will look out of the window while you dine."

Selina felt like a receiver of stolen goods while she eat the small share of food left for her, and was so apprehensive of being detected in the operation by the waiter, that she hurried through it as rapidly as she could.

"As you never drink wine," observed Lady Caldersfoot, "I need leave none for you." And taking the decanter, she emptied the portion of its contents which she had not consumed, into one of the *flaçons* of her dressing-box, which she had kept in the room, as it now appeared, for the purpose. "As one must pay for every thing in an inn," continued she, "I always make it a point to have the value of my money. You may now retire to your room, and I will ring for the waiter to remove the things," pointing to the fragments on the table.

The host and hostess of the inn, no bad judges of appearance, had on seeing Selina set her down as a lady. When, however, they found that she was not to dine with Lady Caldersfoot, and that she had assisted the chamber-maid in arranging her Ladyship's room, they began to think she must act in the capacity of *femme de chambre*.

"Well, there is really now no means of judging who persons are by their dress or air," said the hostess; "I could have sworn the young person was a gentlewoman."

"Yes, she is indeed more like one than that crazy old woman she accompanies," replied the husband.

"The poor thing looks much too genteel to be put in the servants' room with the others," observed the hostess.

"I think, my dear, it would be as well to ask her to dine with us."

"Just as you please, my dear."

"And," resumed she, "I hav'n't the heart to put her into one of those dark closets, into which we generally thrust ladies'-maids. No I 'll let her keep the room next her mistress's, which I had chosen for her when I believed she was a lady, and I 'll step up and ask her to dine with us."

Grateful for this civility, Selina politely declined it, alleging a headach, which she really had, as an excuse. Her spirits were depressed, for she could not help contrasting the treatment already experienced from her present mistress, and the prospect of a continuance of it, with that received from her lamented one, the Duchess of Glenallen, or the kind and amiable Mrs. Fraser. To be the companion, nay more, the servant of so very absurd and ridiculous a woman as Lady Caldersfoot, was highly mortifying, and must inevitably expose her to constant annoyance. While making these reflections, she was summoned to the presence of that lady.

"I wish to walk on the Pier," said she; "the news of my arrival has doubtlessly spread, and people will be impatient to see me. I will call at the circulating libraries, and inquire for my own books. I always make it a point to do so when I am travelling — it helps the sale; and I enjoy the surprise and delight of the librarian when I disclose who I am."

The dress of Lady Caldersfoot was more remarkable for its variety of colours and meretricious ornaments, than for richness or good taste; and assorted so ill with her plain and highly rouged face, as always to attract an attention that would have been anything but agreeable to most women, but which she considered as a homage paid to her imagined celebrity.

Selina soon found herself painfully embarrassed by the rude staring directed towards her companion, who, instead of being distressed, or attributing it to the true cause, was evidently much gratified, and observed, —

"It is quite clear these good people know who I am, for you see how they follow me. This is one of the consequences of fame; but I am so accustomed to it, that I rather look for than seek to avoid it."

"Ah! here is a circulating library," and entering it, she said, "pray, Sir, have you got 'The Delicate Dilemma?'" and Lady Caldersfoot addressed the librarian, assuming an air of mingled dignity and condescension.

"Yes, Ma'am, I know we have it; but it is so little inquired for, that I really hardly know where to put my hand on it."

And the man commenced searching for the work. Selina stole a glance at her Ladyship, on whose countenance anger and indignation strove for mastery.

"If you cannot find 'The Delicate Dilemma,'" observed she, "let me have the 'Foibles of Fashion,' by the same distinguished authoress."

"I 'm very sorry, Ma'am, but I have not got any other of the works of Lady Caldersfoot. Finding that they are never asked for, I don't order them. Indeed, the one I am looking for, has been always sent back to me in a few hours, with an observation that it was unreadable."

"Which proves," said Lady Caldersfoot, "that your subscribers must be wholly deficient in taste and judgment." And she walked with a stately air out of the shop, leaving its proprietor perfectly astonished. "What an idiot that monster in human shape is," observed the angry authoress. "I was half tempted to declare my name, and overwhelm him with confusion. What Goths the inhabitants of Dover must be! But let us proceed to another circulating library."

In their progress in search of one, Lady Caldersfoot continued to attract so much attention, that her companion felt really ashamed.

"That must be some old French woman painted up and dressed in such an outlandish fashion," said a rough-looking sailor to another, as they passed, rudely staring at Lady Caldersfoot.

"My heyes," observed a second passer-by, "what a crazy-looking old frigate!"

None of these insulting comments escaped the ears of the person to whom they were directed, and so greatly did they irritate her, that Selina, although fully sensible of, and disgusted with, the vanity and folly which had occasioned them, pitied Lady Caldersfoot. They entered a second circulating library, and, as in the former one, the lady inquired for one of her novels. The same, or nearly similar, answers were given to her; and now her indignation conquering her prudence, she told the owner of the shop that his subscribers must be the most stupid and

tasteless readers in the world not to have demanded the writings of so celebrated an authoress.

"Why, as to that, Madam," replied the man, piqued into anger by her sweeping censure on his customers, "I believe my subscribers are rather above than below the general class; for as Dover has a continual succession of distinguished and fashionable stationary visitors, as well as those who pass through, going to, or coming from France, there must surely be some good judges of literature among them, and I have never before been asked for the works of the authoress you have named."

"You have surely seen the reviews on these works," said the lady, "and the frequent complimentary mention of them in extracts in the newspapers taken from evening papers?"

"Yes, Madam, I have, but such puffs have no influence here. A good-natured editor often speaks favourably of books of which his opinion is quite different; and extracts from an evening paper, we all know to be nothing more nor less than paid advertisements from the publisher. Then, Madam, we are all aware that publishers have vehicles of their own for puffing works when editors or critics in the regular line are too honest to help them to sell bad books by praising them."

"And pray, Sir, how did you acquire this intimate knowledge of the secrets of publishers?" demanded Lady Caldersfoot haughtily.

"By having lived some years with a fashionable publisher in London, Madam," was the reply.

"I will not give you any more trouble, Sir," said Lady Caldersfoot, leaving the shop, angered beyond measure by the disclosure made by the librarian, and especially in the presence of Selina, whom she wished to be deeply impressed with the value of extracts from evening papers and favourable reviews. That *she* should now be let into the secrets of publishers, a circumstance which must lower the fame of her mistress in her eyes, *was most* vexatious, and, quite disgusted with Dover Librarians, *she retraced* her steps to the inn. In the hall she met the *proprietor*, and inquired of him, "Whether he had notified her *arrival?*"

"Yes, my Lady."

"And what has been the result?"

"I was told, your Ladyship, that your coming or going was nothing to the authorities. It was only to Royalty or Ambassadors that they were to pay honours."

"Didn't you tell them who I am — what my celebrity is?"

"Yes, my Lady, and they laughed in my face, and asked me who told me of it? and when I answered, that I had it from your Ladyship's own lips, they laughed more and more, and so I came away."

"Brutes, illiterate brutes!" exclaimed the lady, "have any requests for my autographs been made?"

"Not one, your Ladyship; and though I offered them to all the travellers in the coffee-room, just out of civility, no one wanted them."

"Well, this is most extraordinary, most unprecedented, I must say, and proves that there must be no appreciation of literature, or those whose works adorn it, in Dover. Be so good as to send my domestic," and Lady Caldersfoot, with an air of the utmost dignity, ascended the stairs. The man soon appeared, his face flushed, and his eyes emitting a lustre very unusual to them. "I sent for you, Theodore," said his mistress, "to inform you, that I will sail by the morning's steamer to Calais. Go, and secure passages for me and my suite; mind you say, — the celebrated Lady Caldersfoot and her suite!"

"Yes, your Ladyship, but I hope you do not expect me to tell 'em that your Ladyship is a hauthoress."

"And why not, pray?"

"Because it may get me into trouble, your Ladyship."

"Get you into trouble!" repeated the lady, in astonishment.

"Yes, my Lady. Why I have had such a piece of work in the servant's room as I never had in all my born days, and all because I did as your Ladyship told me. I said you were a celebrated hauthoress, and all the rest of it as your Ladyship desired me; when, would you believe it, one of the ladies'-maids, *a himperent pert* cretur as ever I seed in my life, begins *for to laugh outright*; and when I asked her what she laughed at,

she said your Ladyship was one of the poorest authoresses in all England. I up and told her, your Ladyship paid your way, like any other lady, when she burst out louder than ever, and said she didn't mean anything about money matters, though she had heard you were very stingy. 'Then what do you mean, Miss?' says I. 'I mean,' says she, 'that your mistress's books is all stuff and nonsense, for when I was in my last place, and she sent her novel as a present to Lady Millenton, her ladyship laughed downright; and when I offered to cut the leaves open, her Ladyship told me there was no occasion, for she should never read a line of it. This put my blood up, and I said Lady Millenton was no better than she should be, for being so ungrateful for a present. And then her fellow-servant, who I believe is her sweetheart too, for he reddened up when he saw she was affronted, asked me if I know'd what a hauthoress was? I said to be sure I did. 'Then,' says he, 'a hauthoress is no better than a liar, who invents all sorts of stories, and writes 'em down, and gets money for 'em. Why it 's a burning shame, so it is,' says he, 'to get money for lies, when poor sarvants are scolded and discharged if *they* are found telling 'em.'"

"Monsters! ignorant stupid monsters!" exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot, "not to be able to perceive the difference between the noble inspirations of genius and the moral turpitude of falsehood."

"Human patience couldn't stand it no longer, your Ladyship, so I gives him my mind. He grew more saucy, and we were coming to blows, when the landlord came and told me your Ladyship wanted me."

"You must treat such ignorant brutes with contempt, Theodore," said his mistress, assuming an air of dignity.

"That 's just what I was going to do, your Ladyship. Whenever any man hinsults me, I give him a good hiding, if I can, that 's my way of showing my contempt."

"Go now Theodore, and engage the places at the packet-office; but be sure to tell that I am the celebrated Lady Caldersfoot."

"Well, my Lady, I hope no harm will come of it; but, to

tell the truth, I'm almost afraid I'll be getting into trouble wherever we go, for I can't bear to see folks laughing, or to hear 'em call your Ladyship a liar."

"Oh! that perfidious Lady Millenton," exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot. "How terrible to find one has been deceived where one had most trusted. Cæsar felt not more despair when he saw that the mortal wound was inflicted by his friend, and exclaimed, 'Et tu, Brute!' than I now do. Well may I say, 'And you, Lady Millenton!'"

CHAPTER XLIV.

The remainder of the evening was spent by Lady Caldersfoot in uttering reflections on the ingratitude, envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness of the world, and particularly the female portion of it.

"Oh, Selina!" exclaimed she, "could you know the trials I have experienced in this way, you would indeed wonder how, with a frame so delicate, and so exquisitely sensitive a mind and heart, I have been able to resist them. This Lady Millenton, whose duplicity has been this evening revealed to me, I believed to be my most devoted friend. How many times has she assured me, that my writings were the solace of her solitary hours, that I was a second De Staël. She has, many a time and oft, addressed notes to me as Corinne, and has even requested me to have my portrait painted as Corinne, at the Capitol. But there is one consolation in all such trials. I know the praise came flowing from the heart, forced from it by excess of honest, fervent admiration. The after detraction is the offspring of base envy, wrung from it by seeing the fame, the celebrity accorded me. Thus, as the bee can extract nothing but honey, even from poisonous flowers, I can extract good from evil. However, such trials enable me to know the human heart, and this is the secret of my power of painting its feelings so admirably well. After the first pangs of disappointment are a little subdued, I reflect that my own superiority has elicited the envy, from whose workings I suffer, and I

remember that great genius ever has, and ever will, be pursued by envious detractors. I made the reputation of beauty for Lady Millenton, as well as for many other of my false friends. I took her for my heroine, painted exaggerated pictures of her person, flattered it as well as her mind, and got my publishers to print a key to the characters in the book, by which it became known who were meant. To be sure, this plan was useful in extending the sale; for one of the most successful baits to catch public curiosity, is to let it be supposed that a novel is filled with personalities. Nevertheless one has surely reason to expect that the commonplace women, whom an authoress elevates on a pedestal, and gives a sort of celebrity to, ought to be grateful. But, alas! such is the ingratitude of persons, that their sense of obligation is forgotten in the more acute ones of envy and jealousy. Now, I am convinced that the woman, who Theodore told me had spoken so insultingly about my authorship, is a paid agent, sent down here by my enemies, to incite the ignorant to affront me. You look incredulous, Selina, but you know not the persecutions to which persons of great genius are exposed. Yes, I feel now quite certain that the negligence of the civil and military authorities, the rude remarks of the low persons in the street, and the impertinence of the librarians, were the result of the machinations of my enemies, who must have expended great sums to have gained over those people. But this vast expenditure and trouble, taken to prevent my being honoured with a triumph here, or even an ovation, is the most convincing proof of my celebrity, and the envy it creates. I am, like Rousseau, a martyr to the machinations of my enemies; but my mind being greater I do not allow them to embitter my life, as they did his."

Selina, who had never before come in contact with one of the *genus irritabile*, began to be seriously alarmed for the sanity of her mistress. Could that poor, misguided woman really believe the gross improbabilities she uttered, or was the whole thing got up to impose on others? was a question she put to herself. But when she reflected on the weakness and vanity of Lady Caldersfoot, revealed by innumerable proofs every hour since she had been with her, she began to think that that lady was a mono-

maniac, mad only on the one subject, and that one a false estimate of her own talents.

When the bill was brought next morning, Lady Caldersfoot carefully read over the items, and added up the total.

"There is a great mistake in this account," said she, ringing the bell. The waiter answered the summons, and she pointed out to him that dinner had been charged to her *femme de chambre* for the previous evening, although she had not had any. "Tea also is charged, which is likewise an error, as the young person partook of none."

"Both were provided, Madam, and it is the regular custom in this house to charge for what has been provided, even though it may not be eaten."

"I must say I think the custom a very improper one, and also that the charges are very high."

"I assure your Ladyship that we never make different prices, whatever may be the station of our customers."

"But when celebrated persons, authors of distinction, for example, whose presence in an inn must draw attention to it, a reduction should surely be made."

"No author has hitherto claimed any such exemption from the general charges of the house, Madam, and I am sure the proprietor would not consent to make any abatement."

The bill was paid with great reluctance, and the waiter and chamber-maid received so small a remuneration, that they were more than half tempted to refuse it, and betrayed by their manner their dissatisfaction. The newspaper, in which was inserted the notice of her departure, written by herself, was sent to the coffee-room, that its occupants should not remain in ignorance of having had so remarkable a lady beneath the same roof with them. Papers were also sent to the proprietors of both the libraries visited the previous evening, her Ladyship being determined, as she said, to cover them with confusion by this proof of the estimation in which she was held by the London world.

When Lady Caldersfoot and suite, as she loved to term her two attendants, had embarked, she desired to speak to the captain of the packet. He was busily engaged at the time, and told her ser-

vant so, but her Ladyship was by no means disposed to wait until he was more at leisure, and kept sending "Theodore," to him, until the latter, unused to the movement and odour peculiar to steam-packets, felt compelled to retire, and was not again visible until the vessel arrived at its destined port. When the captain did present himself before Lady Caldersfoot, she told him that she desired to see him, merely for the purpose of informing him he had on board one of, if not *the* most, distinguished authoress of England.

"Very proud of the honour, Ma'am, I 'm sure," was the reply; "which is the lady?"

"I am the lady, Sir; my name is Lady Caldersfoot." She expected that the captain would evince some symptoms of surprise, and more profound respect than previously; but he simply bowed. "I thought it right, Sir, to inform you of the responsibility you have incurred, when you have on board a public character like myself — one on whom so many eyes are turned, for whose safety so many thousands are interested."

"I hope, my Lady, I know my duty, and that I should take as much care of my vessel, and passengers, if I had only the humblest on board, as if I had the greatest."

"Nevertheless, Sir, as Cæsar thought fit to tell the boatman when he embarked, 'You carry Cæsar and his fortunes,' I thought it right to declare who I am."

"Very like, my Lady, but the case is somewhat different. Cæsar, as you say, had his fortune aboard with him, and therefore it was quite proper for him to give notice of it to the captain of the packet."

"You mistake, Sir."

"Coming, coming," said the captain, answering to the repeated calls for him from another part of the deck. "I beg pardon, my Lady, I 'm wanted." — "What a rum old un it is," thought he, as he hurried away.

"You will now have an opportunity of observing the effect of mind over body," said Lady Caldersfoot to Selina, who she kept in close attendance near her; "*I* never suffer the slightest incon-

venience from the sea. Intellectual people, I believe, never do. My secret is to keep my thoughts fixed on some elevated point."

"That accounts for the old lady's looking up at the top of the mast ever since we got out of the harbour," observed a plain old man *sotto voce* to his companion.

"But *à-propos* of elevated subjects," resumed Lady Caldersfoot. "I am reminded that I must give some advice to the captain. Perhaps you, Sir," addressing herself to the plain old man, "will be so obliging as to inform him that Lady Caldersfoot wishes to speak to him."

"I 'm sorry, Ma'am, I can't go to him; but the truth is, it is only by keeping in one posture, and not attempting to move, that I avoid sea-sickness. I have been for some time adopting your plan, Ma'am, of fixing my eyes on the top of the mast, but I can't yet tell whether it will succeed or not."

"*My* plan, Sir?" reiterated Lady Caldersfoot, "I really do not comprehend you. I am not aware of having ever communicated any plan to you, or, indeed, of having ever seen you before!"

"Very true, Ma'am; very true; but I happened to overhear you tell the young lady with you, that the best mode to avoid sea-sickness was to keep the thoughts fixed on some elevated point, and so I —"

"Totally mistook my meaning, Sir," and the lady moved away with an air of the utmost dignity. "You see, Selina," observed she, "how every word that falls from the lips of a person of celebrity, and, above all, of literary celebrity, is seized hold of. I cannot utter a word that there is not some eavesdropper listening to note it down, in order to transfer it to his diary or commonplace-book. The worst of it is, as in the present instance, people hear the words, but do not comprehend the sense. Only fancy the vulgar person we have just seen, imagining that while my thoughts were ranging through the vast expanse of ether on high, and resuming some of those problems, with regard to the heavens, that have occupied the minds of the greatest philosophers, from the "starry Galileo" to our own Newton, I was thinking of the main-mast-top. So it is, that narrow and uncultivated minds cannot comprehend great ones. But I forgot. I must see the captain;

indeed, it is of vast importance that I should, not only to me, but perhaps to thousands. Go and tell him to come to me."

Selina, much embarrassed to thread her way through the crowd on deck, proceeded in search of the captain, whom she at length found, and requested him to go to Lady Caldersfoot. He seemed in no hurry to attend the summons. Urged, however, by Selina, he came and presented himself before the lady.

"I sent for you, Sir," said she, "to explain a matter that may not only benefit thousands of your future passengers, but be of considerable advantage in securing the cleanliness of your vessel."

"Much obliged, Ma'am," replied the capitain, making an awkward attempt at a bow.

"Having turned my thoughts to many grave subjects for benefitting mankind," resumed the lady, "I have ascertained that the occupation of the mental faculties by works of the most spirit-stirring and exciting nature is the only preventative of that most dreadful ailment, sea-sickness."

"Lord love you, Ma'am! it 's of no manner of use. I 've seen people get sea-sick while their minds were intent on reading the state of the funds, and even while under the excitement of strong liquors."

"How shocking!" exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot. "But you do not comprehend me. I did not refer to the vulgar excitement you imagine. I meant some high intellectual treat. My works, for example. Buy a complete edition of them, leave the books in the cabin, and I am persuaded those who take them up will be so delighted that they will not suffer from sea-sickness, however rough the sea may be."

An arch smile of incredulity played over the lips of the captain.

"Well, my Lady," oberved he, "if your Ladyship will send down a set of the books *gratis*, for I can't afford to buy 'em, we 'll try the effect."

"I never give away my works, except to the most distinguished of the nobility," replied Lady Caldersfoot haughtily. "I believed I was rendering a service to humanity, as well as to you, Sir, by

recommending this plan to your attention. If you reject it, the fault is not mine: I have done my duty in suggesting it," and she turned away from the captain with an air of offended dignity, while he, making a grimace, meant for the edification of the bystanders, applied the thumb of his right hand to his nose, extending the fingers in a direct line in front of it, and walked away, followed by the laughter of those to whom this vulgar gesture was addressed, leaving Lady Caldersfoot wholly unconscious of the cause of the laughter she heard around her.

"I must elevate my thoughts above this sublunary sphere," said she to Selina. "I always do when shocked by the ignorance and stupidity of the vulgar herd of mankind. Behold the clouds drifting away, and revealing the sun, whose bright beams have dispersed them. Here, Selina, here is my note-book, write down every word I utter, for I feel an inspiration, and the passages noted down will come admirably into my next book, — yes" and the speaker assumed the inspired look of a sibyl — "even as the sun disperses the clouds, so will knowledge disperse the mists of ignorance, and enlighten those who now dwell in darkness. Oh! how my heart swells and exults at the thought," — and the lady pressed her hand to her heart, and became dreadfully pale. "Hold me Selina, hold me," exclaimed she —

"A basin, a basin," cried out the plain old man; but before it could be brought, a most violent paroxysm of sea-sickness had seized Lady Caldersfoot. "It 's no use looking up at the mast, after all, it seems," said the plain old man. "I thought as much. Poor lady, how sick she is, to be sure. Why it 's as much as ever the steward can do to hold her up."

"It 's a pity she hadn't some of her own books to read," observed the captain, winking his eye at those around him, "for they 'd have kept away the sea-sickness." So prostrated were the spirits, and thoughts of Lady Caldersfoot by the violence of her suffering, that when the vessel arrived at Calais she was hardly able to move. She was supported into the room where passengers wait to have their trunks, &c. examined, and there, with a pallid face, crushed bonnet, and dishevelled locks, she sat the picture of despair.

"Tell them, Selina, *who* I am," said she. "Surely when they know, they will respect genius; they will allow my property to be removed to the inn — they paid this mark of respect to Sir Walter Scott when he visited France; can they do less towards me?"

"I am afraid, Madam, my representation will not have the desired effect," replied Selina, timidly.

"And why not, pray?" asked the lady angrily. "Am I a less distinguished writer — less entitled to homage?"

Urged by this angry remonstrance, Selina advanced to one of the *douaniers*, and, ashamed and embarrassed by her mission, told him, in pure French, that Lady Caldersfoot was an authores of distinction.

"*Eh bien, Mademoiselle, tant mieux pour elle; mais qu'est ce que cela me fait?*"

Selina explained, that she believed it was customary to exempt authors of distinction from paying duty on their clothes, or even from having them examined, and cited Sir Walter Scott.

"*Voltaire Scote*," exclaimed the *Douanier*, "*mais c'était un homme célèbre, c'est autre chose. Mais pourquoi aurions-nous du faire exception de lui-même, malgré tout notre désir de lui faire hommage, si le Gouvernement n'avait pas donné des ordres.*"

Selina returned to Lady Caldersfoot, and related the ill success of her interview with the *Douanier*.

"Owing, I am convinced," exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot, "to your not having properly explained my celebrity to him. Were I not too ill, I would have made him sensible of my importance, and of the dishonour to France in not marking its respect and deference to genius and celebrity like mine. Had you told him that I was considered the De Staël of England, the Corinne, he must have felt sensible of the propriety of exempting me from all trouble. His affecting not to know me, for that he does not know my name and fame I never can believe, must be the work of my enemies. Yes, the wretch has been bribed by them, I am sure."

The *Douanier* now approached, and demanded the keys of the dressing-case and trunks of Lady Caldersfoot, who, too ill and

languid to argue with him, though greatly disposed to do so, again appealed to Selina to represent to him once more her claim to exemption from his regular rules. "Tell him," said she, "that when the King of the French hears how ill-treated I have been, which his Majesty shall learn from my own lips, the persons belonging to the Custom House will be severely reprimanded."

"*Ah bah! nous verrons cela; dépêchez-vous, Madame,*" said the *Douanier*, "*Donnez-moi les clefs?*"

"Do, pray, Madam," whispered Selina.

"*Monsieur*," replied Lady Caldersfoot, drawing herself up with dignity, "*quand je serai aux Tuilleries avec sa majesté le Roi des Française, je lui dirai que vous ne m'avez pas montré le respect qu'on doit à une femme de génie, une auteresse célèbre comme moi.*"

"*Et en quoi, Madame, ai-je manqué le respect envers vous, s'il vous plait?*"

This dialogue had excited the attention of several of the persons around the interlocutors, and sundry smiles and shrugs of the shoulders were given among them.

"*Dépêchez-vous, Madame, dépêchez-vous, le monde m'attend,*" resumed the *Douanier*.

"*Monsieur, je dirai au Roi comme vous vous êtes mal conduisé à moi envers, — moi qui suis considerée la Staël, la Corinne même, de la Grande Bretagne.*"

"*Mon Dieu! est-il possible, est-il possible?*" exclaimed the man in a tone of the utmost impatience.

"*Oui, Monsieur, je vous repète que je suis la Staël de la grande Bretagne.*"

"*En fin, Madame, voulez-vous, oui ou non, donner les clefs?*"

A circle of persons, evidently much amused, were now collected around Lady Caldersfoot, and Selina felt her shame and embarrassment every moment increase, at being with a person who drew such ridicule on herself, and those belonging to her. "Pray, pray, give him the keys," whispered she, "Indeed, you will suffer in your health from remaining in this place, and being annoyed."

The keys were reluctantly produced, and this very reluctance

having led the *Douanier* to believe that the trunks or dressing-box contained something contraband, he minutely examined the contents of both. He drew out of the latter a pot of rouge, which he maliciously held up, so that the persons around him could see it and, turning the lower end up, to see the name of the maker, exclaimed, "*A la bonne heure, c'est bien Français,*" — he replaced it. He then took up some pearl powder, and looked at the label, "*Encore Français,*" said he. "*Il parait que la Staël de la grande Bretagne protége beaucoup les marchandises Françaises.*"

This remark, and the display of the articles that occasioned it, drew forth a general laugh.

"*Mais, qu'est-ce que c'est que ça?*" said the *Douanier*, drawing forth one of the *flaçons* of the dressing-box, opening it, and applying it to his nostrils. "*Ma foi, ç'est le vin, et du vin fort aussi, non pas de la France. C'est donc contrebande, et il sera confisqué.*"

Another laugh followed this last discovery, but Lady Caldersfoot, was too much fatigued, though dreadfully angry, to give vent to her indignation.

"How unfortunate," whispered she to Selina, "that I should have put that sherry in my dressing-box at Dover. Did you hear the brutes around us laugh. Well might Burke say, 'The Age of Chivalry was passed.' Had there been one gentleman among the set, he would have stepped forward to protect me from insult. But I will punish that barbarian, I will write a book on the outrages committed on women by the French Custom-house officers, that must speedily produce a total change in the whole system. I am, however, convinced, that my enemies have been at work here, as well as at Dover, to get me into trouble. Be assured, that two, if not more emissaries, came over in the packet with us, paid to occasion me every possible annoyance in their power."

At length the *Douanier* having finished his examination of Lady Caldersfoot's effects, she left the Custom-house, and supported on the arm of Selina, attempted to walk towards the inn, jostled by porters recommending the various hotels to which they

belonged, or by men conveying away the luggage of the different passengers.

"Where is Theodore? Do pray, Selina, call that stupid fellow, on whom I have never set my eyes since I entered the ship," said Lady Caldersfoot.

Selina looked on every side, ant at last beheld Theodore, pale, and evidently still very unwell, leaning against a wall. She elevated her voice to its utmost extent to call him, Lady Caldersfoot being too weak to sustain herself without the support of her arm. One of the porters, noticing that something was required, offered his services.

"Call that man," said Selina, pointing out the servant.

"His name is Theodore," added Lady Caldersfoot.

"Theodore, Theodore!" cried the porter, with the lungs of a Stentor; but not the least notice did the person so addressed take of the summons.

"Look at the stupid monster," said his mistress. "There he remains as if deaf."

The porter now approached close to the servant, and, slapping him on the shoulder, informed him in French, calling him Theodore, that two ladies required his presence. But the man not understanding a single word of French, and having totally forgotten the new appellation given him by his mistress, refused to move, and the porter, in despair, returned to state that fact.

"Call him by the name of Thomas," said Selina, guessing the truth; and no sooner was this name heard by its owner, than he instantly accompanied the messenger to Lady Caldersfoot, who, ill as she was, could not refrain from bitterly reproaching him for his stupidity. A *fiacre* was now called by the *Commissionnaire,* into which the unfortunate *"de Staël de la grande Bretagne,"* as she loved to term herself, was assisted. Theodore being ordered by her to get up behind, and Selina entering the vehicle, they were driven off to the hotel, selected not by Lady Caldersfoot, but by the person most interested in the choice, namely, the *Commissionnaire,* who had marked their forlorn state, and determined to take advantage of it, by conducting them to the worst hotel in Calais, but which happened to be that to

which he belonged. Worn down, and dispirited, Lady Caldersfoot, though she perceived the inferiority of the house as soon as she entered it, was unequal to the effort of going in search of a better, and was glad to retire to her bed.

CHAPTER XLV.

Lady Caldersfoot continued so ill that she was not able to commence her journey to Paris for two days, although most desirous to leave the uncomfortable hotel in which she had taken up her abode. The badness of the accommodation could only be equalled by the extravagance of the charges; and her angry expostulations to induce a reduction of them, proved utterly unavailing, nay, more, exposed her to much incivility.

Theodore was found to be perfectly useless, owing to his entire ignorance of the French language, joined to his natural stupidity, which prevented the possibility of his even guessing the meaning of signs or signals. His mistress too late discovered the mistake she had made, in bringing with her to a foreign country a servant almost incapable of fulfilling his duty in his own; and, with an unreasonableness peculiar to weak and irritable persons, reprimanded him so often, and so severely, as to render him still more stupid. The whole route to Paris was embittered by her recriminations and ill temper.

"How can you be so stupid?" was a frequent question addressed to poor Theodore.

"I 'm sure, my Lady, I don't know. I try all I can not to be so; but it seems, the more I try, the worse it is."

This answer, so full of truth and simplicity, might have disarmed a less unreasonable person than the one to whom it was addressed, but it did not mitigate her wrath, which daily increased, as new and manifold proofs were given of her servant's sins of omission and commission.

"*Mettez le sabot, vîte, mettez le sabot,*" would the postilion cry out, when on the point of descending a steep hill, but Theodore remained fixed in the seat behind the carriage; and Selina, compelled to protrude half her person out of the window, and to

scream, to the utmost extent of her voice, an explanation of what was required, became hoarse before the end of the first day's journey.

"Why can't you comprehend what is wanted, once that it has been told you?" would Lady Caldersfoot angrily exclaim.

"Oh! your Ladyship, it all comes because I don't understand their lingo. If the postboys would only call out, Put on the drag, I'd know what they meant in a jiffey, and it would cost them no more trouble, but they are so obstinate that they won't."

Never did the simplicity of Theodore extort a laugh, or even a smile from his mistress, who herself wholly deficient in common sense, or quickness of apprehension, was the last person to make allowance for these defects in others. No inn on the route was left without a dispute about the charges in the bill, and never, in a single instance, did she carry her point of getting a reduction made in them. *Au contraire*, the innkeepers were more disposed to punish her angry expostulations, by adding some items, alleged to have been omitted by mistake, and in many places she was subjected to an insolence, that led Selina to wonder how she could risk exposing herself to such annoyances.

Worn down, and exhausted, Lady Caldersfoot and suite, as she styled her two attendants, entered Paris, and drove to the Hotel Bristol, where they experienced considerable difficulty in procuring rooms, the terms demanded being considerably more than her Ladyship wished to give, and the proprietor of the hotel not feeling at all disposed to make any abatement in his terms to a person whose appearance and manner were so little engaging. An *appartement au cinquième* was, after much debating, hired, not, however, without her Ladyship assuring the landlord, that she was greatly shocked at the notion of the great and noble visitors, who would be sure to come to see her, being exposed to ascend to such a height.

"Perhaps," said she, "you could lend me a *salon au premier* to receive the junior branches of the royal family, the ministers, ambassadors, and ambassadresses."

This favour was refused. His house, he assured her, was *always too well filled to* leave a *salon au premier* at his disposal.

And now he was informed — much to the discomfiture of Selina — of who he had the honour of lodging. Lady Caldersfoot left nothing unsaid, to impress her importance on his mind; but her explanations of her literary celebrity, though worded in a style of magniloquence that might have rivalled the puffs on her own books, extracted from an "evening paper," produced not the least effect on him. A good equipage, a dashing courier, and a numerous suite of domestics, were the claims that never failed to meet his attention; and the words, "*vieille folle*," which he uttered *sotto voce* as he retired from her Ladyship's presence, proved how little impressed he was by her self-laudations.

Half dead with fatigue she ascended to the fifth story, an operation that cost her many minutes to perform, and left her panting for breath when it was achieved.

The morning after her arrival, Lady Caldersfoot commanded a *voiture de remise*, and, accompanied by Selina, set out on a shopping expedition.

"*Conduizez-moi à la premier modiste*," said she to the *laquais de place*, appointed to attend her. He gave her instructions to the coachman, who stopped in the Rue de la Paix, at a very small *magazin de modes*, and the *laquais* hastened to open the door of the carriage.

"*Etes-vous bien súr que celleci est la premier magazin de modes à Paris?*" demanded Lady Caldersfoot, impressed with a belief that it could not be, from the smallness of the shop and the meagre display in the window.

"*Certainement non*," replied the *laquais*.

"*Mais pourquoi donc m'avez-vous menez ici, quand je vous a dit que je vouler aller a la première magazin de Paris?*"

"*Pardon, Madame, vous m'avez dit d'aller au premier magazin, non pas à Paris, mais à celui qui était le plus près de l'hôtel.*"

"*Mon Dieu que vous est stupide*," exclaimed the lady, her face flushed with anger.

"*Pas plus stupide qu'un autre*," said the man sulkily; "*est-ce ma faute que vous ne pouvez pas parler Français?*"

"Do instruct the *monstre* where to go, Selina. Explain that I wish to be driven to the most fashionable *modiste* in Paris."

The *laquais* who had heard the word monster, and guessed it had been applied to himself, became outrageous at this insult.

"*Monstre!*" repeated he, "*Vous êtes bien peu comme-il-faut d'oser appeler un homme comme moi monstre; un homme brave qui a servi son pays. Mais vous êtes comme tous vos compatriots, vous cherchez d'humilier les Français; et ce ne sera jamais dit que Pierre Châtel qui a combattu avec Napoléon, a reçu du pain d'une vieille bête d'Anglaise qui l'appelle monstre! Va! cherchez un autre laquais de place, vieille sorcière, je vous souhaite le bonjour;*" and the *laquais* walked off, leaving the door of the carriage open, and the steps down.

"Was there ever such insolence?" demanded Lady Caldersfoot, almost suffocated with anger. "What are we to do?"

"I will let down the front glass, request the coachman to put up the steps, and close the door; and then I think, Madam, you had better return to the hotel for another *laquais*."

"Oh, no! not on any account. I would not for worlds have the coachman leave the box. The horses would be sure to run away."

At that moment the owner of the *magazin de modes*, who had seen the carriage stop at his door, came out, and in the most bland tone inquired whether the ladies had any commands to honour him with. He assured them he had a charming assortment of articles of the newest fashion and the very best state.

"We require nothing," replied Lady Caldersfoot, her anger not having yet subsided, and showing itself in her countenance and manner.

"Madame will not find more elegant caps and bonnets in all Paris," urged the shopkeeper.

"All we require is for you to put up the steps, and close the door of the carriage," said Lady Caldersfoot, impatiently.

"*Comment, Madame! Est-ce que vous me prenez pour votre laquais de place? Si vous étiez disposé d'entrer dans mon magasin. Je vous aurais assisté de descendre*; mais, pour faire le *service de votre laquais vous m'excuserez*," and the man-milliner

walked into his shop, and closed the door with a violence that proved his disappointment and indignation.

"Was any thing ever like the conduct of these people?" said Lady Caldersfoot, almost disposed to weep, yet so indignant, that she longed to vent her displeasure on any one within her reach.

And now the passers-by began to pause and stare into the carriage; and the remarkable *toilette* of the elderly lady, so precisely like the caricatures of *les Anglaises pour rire*, exhibited some twenty years before on the *Boulevards*, as well as the evident embarrassment and distress of Selina, attracted their attention. Yet no one evinced any sympathy for their awkward situation, and by degrees the few persons who first stopped to gaze, drew others, until a crowd was literally collected around the carriage.

"*Mon Dieu, mon Dieu!*" exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot, in accents that could leave no doubt of her country, "*comme c'est extraordinaire que dans tous ces personnes que regarde nous il n'a pas une qui voulez nous assist.*"

At that moment a very distinguished looking man, past the meridian of life, but with the air and bearing of a soldier, attracted by the crowd, approached the side of the carriage, close enough to hear the speech, objurgatory, half reproachful, addressed by Lady Caldersfoot to her youthful companion. He instantly advanced to the open door of the vehicle, and taking off his hat begged leave to offer his services to the ladies, and requested they would explain how he could be useful.

"*Nous vous remercie beaucoup, Monsieur,*" replied Lady Caldersfoot, "*pour votre politesse. La fait est mon laquais de place ma laissé ici avec la porte ouvert et l'escalier descendé comme vous vois, parceque je lui avez reprochez pour son mauvais conduite. Imagine, Monsieur, quel horrible position pour une dame d'être ici en un voiture sans un laquais pour ferme le porte, exposé à l'impertinente curiosité de tous ces personnes qui nous entorons.*"

This speech, uttered in a tone loud enough to be heard by the persons nearest the carriage, as it was meant by the speaker it

should be, excited only their merriment, nor did they attempt to conceal their hilarity. The gentleman who had offered his assistance turned around, and, with unaffected dignity, gravely rebuked the laughers, reminding them that such conduct towards women and strangers was not what might be expected from Frenchmen. They, shamed into a sense of their impropriety by his calm reproof, slunk away, and then he again repeated his offer of service.

"*Si vous voulez avoir le bonté de ferme le porte de la voiture, et de direz à mon cocher de me prenez à la hôtel Bristol, Place Vendôme, je veux être bien reconnoissant, Monsieur, et quand vous saurais que je suis Lady Caldersfoot, bien savais par mes travails, je pense que vous ne sera pas fâché d'avoir assisté moi.*"

"*Pour moi, Madame, c'est assez de savoir que vous êtes femme et étrangère pour m'engager de faire tout ce qui pourrait vous être agréable ou utile.*" And putting up the steps with a dignity of manner that proved that even humble occupations may be performed without any loss of grandeur, and which reminded Lady Caldersfoot of a passage in one of her favourite poets, whom she was fond of quoting, that even dung may be tossed with grace and dignity, he closed the door, took off his hat, bowed lowly to her Ladyship, directed the coachman to drive to the Hotel Bristol, and disappeared.

"Oh! what a man, Selina! What dignity! what high breeding! That is indeed a *preux chevalier*. How I regret not having asked his name. Did you observe how the brutes, who stood gazing and laughing at us, fell back when he reproved them. He must be a person of high rank and distinction. A thought strikes me. Yes, it must be so. Depend on it he is the King. Only fancy what an adventure! I am now delighted that my *laquais de place* left us, as it has led to this delightful *rencontre*. What an incident to have to relate: and then only imagine what *his* surprise will be when I am presented at the Tuileries, and that he discovers my celebrity! Oh! it 's quite delightful!"

Lady Caldersfoot was so pleased by what she called this charming adventure, that she quite forgot the disagreeable event that led to it, ere she returned to the hotel. Arrived there, how-

ever, she sent for the proprietor, and made a serious complaint against the *laquais*, to which, as is usual in such cases, she was answered, that of all the *laquais* in attendance at his house, Pierre Châtel was considered the most civil and obliging. He begged the Ladyship's pardon for venturing to assure her that she would not find, in all Paris, a servant who would submit to be accused of stupidity, or called a monster, as Pierre Châtel had complained had occurred to him.

"Then," said the lady, "I will take out my own servant; *he* will not presume to resent any of those little ebullitions of temper peculiar to persons of genius. Monsieur is not, perhaps, aware that I am one of the most celebrated writers in Europe!"

"Yes; Madame did me the honour of confiding that fact to me last evening, on her arrival."

"Ah! true; I had forgotten it. Be so obliging as to send my servant, Theodore. But stay a moment. Do inform me if the King is not a tall, handsome, and noble-looking man?"

"Certainly, Madame, his Majesty is all that. He is to be sure no longer *dans sa première jeunesse*, *mais* he is, nevertheless, *un bel homme*."

"You see I was right, Selina; yes, perfectly right. I always am. *I* never make a mistake, and am consequently more impatient when I observe the stupidity of others. Yes, I knew it was the King."

Theodore now made his appearance, and with a most rueful countenance, of which, however, his mistress took no notice.

"You are to go out with the carriage, Theodore," said she. "I know you are going to remind me that you do not speak a word of French, but that does not signify. All you will be required to do is, to hand to the coachman my written instructions of where he is to drive to, and to open the carriage-door and let down the steps, just as you do at home."

"I beg your Ladyship's pardon, but I 'm so very hill, I can scarce stand upright. The sea-sickness almost killed me; and ever since I have not got a morsel of wholesome victuals, so I 'm *nearly* starved, and so weak, I don't know what to do. I can't ask

for nothing, owing to not knowing their lingo, and they keep offering me such outlandish things as I never seed in all my born days, and can't abide the sight of."

"The air and exercise will do you good, and render you less fastidious about your food, so get your hat and be ready, for I shall go out in a few minutes. And now Selina I think I had better write the announcement of my arrival, without any loss of time."

Lady Caldersfoot ascended to her *appartement au cinquième*, and seated herself at a table, where, having devoted a considerable time to the task, she produced, and with an air of great self-satisfaction, the following article which she read aloud to Selina: —

"*Nous suis heureux de l'avoir dans notre pouvoir à annoncez à nos lecteurs que la plus célébre auteuresse de la grande Bretagne etes arrivez dans notre capital. — Lady Caldersfoot est, comme sera devinez toute suite, la dame en question, et le réputation que ses travails, si plein d'information, génie, interêt et esprit, a aquis pour elle, veux, nous ne doute pas, procurer pour elle un reception plus brilliant que cela de aucun étrangère qui a jamais entrez Paris. — Sa seigneuire a l'intention à restez seulement un court temps avec nous, étant appellez par les autres nations de Europe, à visitez leurs capitals, comme ils sont pressez de playez leurs hommage au de Staël d'Angleterre.*"

"I think that will do," observed she.

"Pardon me, Madam, but there are a few grammatical errors and faults in the idiom," said Selina.

"Errors!" exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot, "what can you possibly be thinking of? I who write French with as great a facility and purity as I do English, to be accused of grammatical errors and faults in the idiom, and by my *femme de chambre*, too! I really wonder at your taking so great a liberty, and I desire you never presume to do so again," and she turned angrily away, evidently deeply offended with Selina.

"We will leave this at Galignani's that he may not only have it inserted in his paper, but also in several others," said Lady Caldersfoot. When arrived at Galignani's, her Ladyship entered his *shop, and announced the* purpose of her visit.

"*Your Ladyship's* arrival will be regularly noticed in our

paper," replied a clerk who spoke English perfectly well, "but if anything more than a simple mention of the name, arrival, and at what hotel is required, it must be paid for as an advertisement."

"Inform me then how much it will cost?"

The clerk ran his eyes over the paper, and a smile he could not conceal, betrayed his sense of its absurdity, and the errors with which it abounded.

"I wish you to have it inserted in three or four of the French newspapers," said Lady Caldersfoot, "and desire that no change, not even that of a single word, may be made in it."

"As you please, Madam," replied the clerk; who, having counted over the number of lines, stated the expense of the advertisements in the different papers, amounting to a larger sum than her Ladyship had calculated on, but which she however paid, remarking how much better such affairs were managed in London, where the proprietors of papers were too happy to receive fashionable news, to make any charge for its insertion. The advertisement, read aloud by the clerk, as soon as its writer had left the shop, produced peals of laughter among the other clerks and *habitues*.

From Galignani's Lady Caldersfoot proceeded to Madame Baréne, the most celebrated Parisian *modiste*, where hats, caps, bonnets, turbans, and *coiffures* of every description were displayed for her inspection. She selected the most youthful, and of the brightest colours, resisting the suggestions of Madame Baréne who, anxious for the credit of her establishment, wished her customers to wear only head-dresses suited to their ages and countenances. As several of these, the least appropriate, were tried on, *les démoiselles* of the *magazin*, and, indeed, the polite Madame Baréne herself, could hardly conceal their inclination to laugh at the airs and pretensions of the very plain elderly lady, whose vanity was so openly exhibited as to lead them to suppose she was half crazed.

"*Je trouve que cette turban de crepe de rose pâle me vais remarquablement. Le rose tendre est mon colour favorite,*" observed she, assuming a languishing air, as she admired herself in the large mirror.

Madame Baréne said she was sorry she could not let her Ladyship have that turban, as it was made for the young bride, La Duchesse de Miraflores, and must be sent home immediately.

"*Faisez moi un precisement comme lui*," said Lady Caldersfoot, "*et je vous prie, laisse moi avoir le demain. — Il faut, aussi, que vous fournissez moi avec un garlande de lauriers.*"

"To be worn on a cap, I suppose, Madame?" inquired the *modiste*.

"*Pas de tout, pas de tout, il est pour porter dans mon cheveux.*"

The utter astonishment of Madame Fanchon and *les démoiselles*, is not to be described, at the notion of an extremely ill-looking old woman, appearing in her hair or rather in a wig, and wearing a wreath.

"*Je suis une auteuresse célébre, enfin le plus célébre de Grande Bretagne, et il est pour cela qui je souhaite de porter le guirlande qui est approprié aux grands auteurs.*"

"*Ah! c'est different, Madame,*" replied the *modiste*, "*Et de quelle forme Miladi, désire-t-elle, que la guirlande soit faite?*"

"*Comme celui représenté dans la tableau de Corinne à la Capitol*," answered Lady Caldersfoot, perfectly unconscious of the ridicule to which she was exposing herself.

Having, as she now considered, made all the purchases necessary for entering society *en grande toilette*, Lady Caldersfoot descended to her carriage — but found that her footman had deserted his post. The porter explained that the servant had been taken so dangerously ill, that he had been obliged to be removed into his lodge, where he still remained in great pain.

"How provoking," exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot, "that he should chose this time above all others to fall ill!"

"*Qu'est-ce que Madame désire soit fait pour le pauvre homme?*" inquired the porter.

"*Envoyez-lui à l'Hospital la plus pres*," replied she with the utmost indifference, "*et laisser-moi savoir l'addresse de la Hospital où il etes placé. Je loge à l'Hôtel Bristol.*"

"*Mais, Madame, ce serait mieux* que vous vous chargiez de

votre domestique. Pauvre homme, il est étranger et nous ne pouvons rien faire pour lui."

"*Envoyez-lui à l'Hospital, et je veux payé pour qu'on auriez soin de lui,*" said the unfeeling old woman; and, motioning to the porter to open the carriage-door, she stepped in followed by Selina, who, shocked and disgusted by her gross selfishness and insensibility, determined, when she entered the hotel, to see its respectable mistress, give her some money to ensure good treatment for poor simple Thomas and to have him removed. The gentle manner, good countenance, and above all, the pure French of Selina, won the good-will of the hostess, who pledged herself to send off a *fiacre* with one of the waiters to remove the poor man, and to have a physician called in to see him. She did not let the hostess know that either the money or kindness originated solely with herself; and so liberal was the donation she placed in her hand, that the kind-hearted Frenchwoman, believing it was sent by Lady Caldersfoot, remarked to her husband when Selina had withdrawn, that "*celle vieille folle Anglaise avait un bon cœur après tout.*"

"*Imaginez-vous, ma chère,*" observed he, "*qu'elle vient de me chercher pour m'expliquer qu'elle est prête de donner de ses autographes à toutes les personnes qui désirent d'en avoir; quelle idée, n'est-ce-pas?*"

"*Elle est Anglaise, mon cher, c'est assez dire,*" was the reply of the hostess, who was firmly convinced that everything strange and eccentric in Lady Caldersfoot might be attributed to her being English — a belief from which many of her compatriots, with higher pretensions to education and knowledge of the world, are not exempt.

The following day the announcement of Lady Caldersfoot's arrival appeared in Galignani's journal, as also in three or four French papers, all which were forwarded to her Ladyship. But what was her dismay, when she observed that, in each journal, the notice was headed by the word *annonce*, proving that the paragraphs were paid for.

"How stupid!" exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot. "This spoils all, for every one will now see that the notice has been paid for,

which will destroy the intended effect, and give rise to spiteful remarks among my enemies. Ah! why should fame be ever followed by envy? and why should my compatriots, instead of being proud of their countrywoman, pursue me with such jealousy?"

CHAPTER XLVI.

The following day Lady Caldersfoot sent her cards to the English ambassadress, and to the few acquaintances she possessed at Paris. She hesitated for some time about favouring, in the same manner, the Parisian ladies of distinction, whose names alone were known to her.

"I am," observed she to Selina, "a public character, and confer honour by making the first advances towards acquaintanceship with these ladies."

"Might it not be better to postpone such advances until your Ladyship has been presented at the Tuileries by the ambassadress?"

"Perhaps so, for then they will be more impressed with a due sense of the honour. Doubtless they are familiar with my works, and long to know the writer; but it is not alone as an authoress that I wish to be recognized. I desire to be known as a woman of fashion, whose opinions on society have great weight and are of vast importance."

In a few hours after this self-laudation, and while Selina was employed in adding some fantastic decorations to the court-dress of her mistress, the proprietor of the hotel made his appearance, and, with a *triste* countenance, announced that he was the bearer of painful intelligence.

"Good Heavens! what is it?" exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot. "Has the King been shot at, and killed, or wounded? That would be too dreadful to me, who am dying with impatience to see his Majesty at the Tuileries, and to thank one of the greatest *monarchs* of Europe, for the service rendered to me in the street yesterday by the first *gentleman*. But you do not speak; you do not tell me if my prophetic soul has rightly divined the fatal cata-

mity you have come to disclose!" said her Ladyship, forgetting that she had not allowed her host time to speak.

"God be thanked, Madam," replied he, "the King is safe! The sad news I came to communicate relates only to your poor servant, who expired in the hospital after a most violent spasmodic attack, pronounced to be cholera."

"Oh! you have quite relieved me. I was terrified for the King, and was thinking that an ode from my pen would be expected, on such an event, by the whole of the royal family; in fact, by all France, if not by Europe."

"Long may it be, Madam, before the pen of any poet be called on to write on such a subject, though, when the sovereign shall be removed from earth, doubtless every poet in France—and we boast many—will pour forth an elegiac strain, rendering it less necessary for foreign bards to commemorate it. But, to resume the *triste* subject which has brought me into your Ladyship's presence, I beg to know whether you have any instructions to give relative to the interment of your late poor servant?"

"None whatever. He will, of course, be buried wherever those who die in the hospital are deposited, unless the students employ the body for anatomical purposes."

"Oh, Madam!" exclaimed the host, turning away with an involuntary gesture of horror. "Surely you will authorize me to see that your poor servant be decently interred."

"I must decline interfering in the business and for two reasons. The first is, that I am a philosopher, and hold it to be wrong to attach the least importance to where the dead are laid. The second is, that as, in all probability, the medical students will take advantage of Theodore's remains for analysing all the internal appearances symptomatic of the malady which is supposed to have caused his sudden death I do not think it right that I should be charged with any further expense. If, as I expect, an autopsy takes place, will you be so obliging as to state to any of the surgeons who may be employed on the occasion, that a person well-skilled in scientific researches, is desirous to know, if the extraordinary stupidity so observable in the deceased when in life, can be at all explained by any remarkable idiosyncrasy in the

development of the brain. I am given to trace effect to cause, and should like to ascertain this point. Indeed, so disposed am I to throw a light on science, that I have left instructions in my will to have my own head opened, in order that the examination of my brain may assist in accounting for how far an unusual development of that organ may confirm the hypothesis, that the genius of great writers and thinkers originates in the large mass of brains. I see you are surprised at the excess of my scientific erudition, no less than of my philosophic self-control and calmness, on subjects that shake the nerves of most of my sex."

"It is true, Madame, I was not prepared to find Madame *si philosophe*. The money that Miladi sent to my wife last evening, by Mademoiselle, to be appropriated for the use of the poor man, who did not live to profit by it, is still in my hands, with the exception of a few *francs*, paid to the persons who conveyed him to the hospital; I thought, therefore, that as it will be amply sufficient to offer a gratuity to the hospital, and to pay for the interment, Madame would not object to its being expended in that way."

"As you please, Sir; for, although I do not attach the slightest importance to such matters, I have no objection to yield to the prejudices of others; so you may employ the money in your hands for the purposes you mention, with only one proviso, namely, that I am not to be called on for any further sum."

"Madame may be perfectly easy on that point, for the money I hold is quite enough."

"*Quelle drôle de femme! quelle drôle de femme!*" murmured the proprietor of the hotel, as he descended the stairs; "*je commence à croire que l'instruction est une mauvaise chose pour les esprits faibles.*"

"So my *femme de chambre* is not only rich but generous," said Lady Caldersfoot to herself, when left to her meditations. "To give a sum sufficient to defray the expenses of the funeral, and make a *cadeau* to the hospital proves this. I longed to find out the precise sum, but any question to my host would have proved that it did not come from me, whereas now I shall have the credit of it. How strange that Selina should have the power to

give so much money! There is something mysterious in all this, something that might be turned to account for a novel; I must wind myself into her confidence, get her to write down the incidents of her life, and convert it into a book, that, with my name, may be a profitable speculation for me. That reminds me that I must get her to note down for me all that she knows of the Duchess of Glenallen. Her adventures might be worked up into something saleable."

Selina had descended to the room of the mistress of the hotel to inquire about poor Thomas, or Theodore as his lady insisted he should be called, and was there when the proprietor descended from his interview with Lady Caldersfoot. Her grave face and moistened eye revealed that she had heard of the death of the poor man.

"Poor fellow! in a strange land, with no one that he knew, or that could understand his language, read the prayers for the dying to him, or close his eyes," said she; "oh! yes, it is sad to die away from one's own country."

"Be assured, Mademoiselle, he was treated kindly. Poor fellow, he fell into delirium almost immediately after he was brought into the hospital, and died unconscious of where he was," said the hostess, a good and kind-hearted woman.

"Miladi, to whom I have communicated her late servant's death, has allowed me to appropriate the money you deposited in my hands yesterday, Mademoiselle, for the funeral expenses, and a small gift to the hospital. At first, Miladi was not disposed to interfere; but when I told her that the money she had sent me by you, Mademoiselle, was sufficient, she permitted me to use it."

Selina blushed deeply at this new proof of the disingenuousness of her mistress, but made no comment on it, being determined not to reveal to the proprietor of the hotel, or his wife, that the money had been her own. She shuddered at the thought, that, should *she* be taken ill, her heartless and selfish mistress would not hesitate to send her off to an hospital, and determined that the first opportunity that should offer, she would avail herself

of it, to seek a home with some mistress on whose humanity and kindness she might count.

When summoned to Lady Caldersfoot's presence, she found that lady had been busily employed in writing. Various sheets of paper, marked by erasures at every line, proving her industry, if not her facility at composition, were before her and her pocket-handkerchief was applied to her eyes, which bore the traces of tears.

"Ah! Selina. You have not heard of the death of poor Theodore! I have been writing a little article on the melancholy event, and I have made such a touching picture of it that it has greatly moved me. When the landlord came, and communicated the decease of the poor fellow to me, in his plain unvarnished manner, it had no effect whatever on my feelings. Events, however sad in themselves, never have, unless represented in a pathetic style; but when I colour and dress them in my own way, you cannot imagine how they touch me. I really have been shedding tears at what I have been writing. This article will immortalize poor Theodore's memory, and reflect eternal honour on mine, not only as a writer, but as a woman possessing that sensibility and tenderness appertaining solely to great genius. I must read you this article; after which I will send it to Galignani's for insertion in several French journals."

The astonishment of Selina at this new insight into the character of Lady Caldersfoot, is not to be described. That imagination, excited into action by a craving for notoriety, should awaken a spurious sensibility that a simple statement of facts could not arouse, seemed to her unsophisticated mind little short of miraculous; and that her mistress should avow it so unconcernedly, appeared to her scarcely less surprising. Hitherto she had been a stranger to the extraordinary influence exercised over weak intellects by an inordinate thirst for celebrity, without the possession of the abilities necessary to achieve this imaginary good. But that an ill-regulated mind, destitute of one ray of genius, should work itself up to a false sentiment by a key, as clocks are wound up to perform certain movements, she had never hitherto had any opportunity of knowing. Consequently, she was at a

loss to account for the moral phenomenon. That Lady Caldersfoot was self-deceived, she could not doubt. The traces of recent tears in her eyes, the flush on her cheeks, and the excitement she manifested at an event which the proprietor of the hotel had declared a short time before had failed to occasion her the least regret, bore evidence to this fact, and Selina considered it as a new page opened to her in the book of life, which, while it furnished her with ample food for reflection, did not serve to exalt her opinion of the heads or hearts of those pretenders to literature, who seek distinction without the means of acquiring it.

Lady Caldersfoot cleared her voice, and commenced the following article: —

"*Le morte inattendu d'un domestique Anglaise dernièrement arrivé à Paris, dans elle même un évèment très peu interessante pour la publique, devient une sujet que engagerez le interêt de tout l'Europe quand on saurais qu'il était laquais de la célébrée Miladi Caldersfoot l'arrivée de laquelle nous vient d'annoncée dans notre dernière nombre. Cet malheureux homme devouée à son noble maîtresse la suivez de l'Angleterre, malgré ses conseilles reiterée que le faiblesse de son santé lui rendez très peu capable pour voyagez. Fierre de la gloire de son belle et distinguer lady, et soyant si continuellement habituer de voir les homages offert à elle dans le trois Royumes Britannique il ne pouvais pas se privez de la bonheur d'être le témoin de sa triumphe à Paris où la génie est aussi bien compris, et si délicatement fêté. Cet pauvre homme a payez avec son vie, son dévotion pour cette dame célébre, mais il ne regrettez pas sa morte excepter d'avoir succumber avans d'avoir vue son noble maîtress recevais cette homage que France est toujours fier d'offrir au grande génie.*

Théodore (le malheureux se nomme comme cela) la j après son arrivée à Paris, voyons Miladi Caldersfoot sortez d son voiture suivez par un laquais de place, il s'étouffe de cha et de jalousie qu'un autre que lui avait cette honor, et soubite tombez malade. Miladi, avec ce profond sensibilité qu' n' tain que au femmes de grand génie, a *deviner ses souffr morales, et frapper par* l'idée qu' il peut être ronger

chagrin, a retournez à la Hôtel pour lui consolez. Mais la coup stoit donnez! Il a exigé pour dernier consolation que son noble maîtresse lui lassera montez derrière son voiture, et arrivée chez la premier modiste de Paris, il est tombé en syncope, et malgré toute ses attentats et celles de toute les médicins que la noble lady chercher il est morte en peu d'heures après, bénissant la nomme de son bienfaitrice, son cher noble et célébrée Miladi Caldersfoot.

Le douleur qui éprouve cet éminent autoress, l'empêche de recevais le visites de les Princes, les noblesse, et les hommes la plus marquent dans le politique, comme dans la literature qui assiège son porte depuis la matin jusque à la soir. Mais nous espere que dans quelque jours elle paroitra à la Cour ou le famille Royal est impatient de la voir."

Lady Caldersfoot wiped her eyes as she finished this article, during the perusal of which the feelings of Selina struggled between disgust and astonishment. Such a tissue of falsehood she had not been prepared for, and she felt angry with herself for feeling disposed to laugh at it.

"But I am afraid," said Lady Caldersfoot, running her finger over the lines to count them, that the insertion of this article will cost me a great deal of money. How provoking that one has to pay for such things in France! Nevertheless, I must have it in the papers; it can't be helped."

The article was despatched, copies of the paper that was to contain it were commanded, and instructions were given that all visitors should be told that her Ladyship was still in such grief that she could receive no one; but that if autographs were asked for, she was ready to bestow them, or to sit for her portrait to any artists of acknowledged merit that might solicit that favour.

"I should be glad," said she to Selina, looking at herself in in the mirror, "that my portrait was taken just now, for the shade of melancholy diffused over my countenance would lend additional interest to the picture, more especially as the date of it will correspond with the death of poor Theodore, an event which, proving my deep sensibility, and the devotion always united in

the breasts of those permitted to approach me, will be gratifying to posterity."

There were moments when Selina really doubted the sanity of Lady Caldersfoot, and yet in no way was the folly of that lady evinced, except by a vanity so surpassing belief, to all save those who witnessed its craving for admiration, and the incessant efforts made to win it, that she was compelled to admit that a monomaniac, if not quite mad, approached very near the confines of insanity, exposing herself to ridicule, while madness inspired only pity. Lady Caldersfoot thought, spoke, dreamt only of self. The rest of the world was looked on only as in relation to any advantage she could derive from it. Those who flattered her she liked, or fancied she liked, for the moment; but for those who did not administer to her self-love she entertained a positive dislike, and attributed their coldness or reserve to envy and jealousy of her celebrity. So insatiable was her vanity, that no food was too coarse to gratify its voracity. Those, and they were many, who, for sake of laughing at her, would utter the most fulsome flatteries, she considered as her only friends, being wholly blind to their insincerity, and to the ridicule their adulation drew on her.

The following day, the papers containing the absurd article written by Lady Caldersfoot were sent to her, and again the word "*annonce*" prefixed to it, proved that it was nothing else than a paid advertisement.

"How enraging!" exclaimed she. "How abominably stupid these French newspaper persons must be. I wonder the literary people here don't manage to bring them to reason. They are more docile with us in England. Who ever saw the publishers' puffs, quoted from 'evening papers,' the names of which, however, are never put down, for the good reason, that no such notices were ever given, inserted as advertisements in London! No; here one of the great means of extending the fame of authors, whom critics are too envious of to render justice to, is unknown!"

"I have been thinking, Selina," resumed Lady Caldersfoot, "that as you have little to occupy your time here, you might keep notes of my conversation with you, as well as of the different

events that occur during my stay, and which I shall not have time to jot down."

"I am afraid, Madam, that I have no talent to enable me to perform such a task satisfactorily."

"I do not, of course, expect you to write as I do. All I require is a plain statement, which I can afterwards colour, as only great writers can. I am sure, that if notes were kept of my conversation, even with my *femme de chambre*, just touched up by me, a publisher in London would pay *me* handsomely for the volume; and I would make you a present for your trouble. Not that it would be a trouble, far from it; it would really become a labour of love, for I say such original, such piquant, such witty things, that you could not fail to be delighted when you read them. But you do not seize the idea as I expected. I am afraid, that although your own language is correct, and that you speak French and Italian tolerably, your intellect is of a mean order. I have noticed that you do not appear to appreciate the brilliant things I say and write. For example, — yesterday, when I read you the notice of the death of poor Theodore, which drew tears from me, and will, I venture to predict, from thousands, instead of showing either the sensibility or enthusiastic admiration I anticipated, you remained unmoved."

"You are right, Madam, my intellect is of a very mean order. I am a very poor judge of literature, and incapable of appreciating brilliant conversation," replied Selina, anxious to escape the odious task of noting down the inane and egotistical sayings of her foolish mistress.

"Do not despair of becoming other than you at present are," said Lady Caldersfoot. "A woman, with an intellect like mine, cannot fail to produce an effect on yours. At present you are surprised, overpowered by my genius, but in time you will become capable of comprehending it."

The next day a visiting card, with an invitation to a *soirée* from the English Ambassadress, put Lady Caldersfoot on the *qui vive*.

"I must make a striking effect on this occasion," observed she to Selina, "for it will be the opening of my Parisian cam-

paign. Lady Granville, that best-bred of all ambassadresses, will, doubtless, assemble all the *élite* of French society to do homage to me, and I should like to render honour to her *salon* by my appearance. All eyes will, of course, be fixed on me; my dress will be noted and copied, so you must exert all your taste and skill in my *toilette* that evening. I must also not be idle. I must prepare replies to the elegant compliments that will, doubtless, be addressed to me on that occasion. Every word I utter will be sure to be commented on, and noted down; and I must maintain the honour of an English *bel esprit*, by a constant fire of *bon mots*, and lively sallies. You must take care that I drink some strong coffee before I go. It clears the intellect and excites the fancy."

It became evident to Selina, after some days, that her mistress's expectations of the sensation her presence was to excite at Paris, had not been realized. Disappointed vanity began to reveal itself in her temper, which, depending solely on adulation, the want of that stimulant rendered her irascible and capricious. The few cards, left at her door, and the constant answer to her daily inquiries, whether autographs had been requested, or if painters had solicited permission to paint her portrait, that no such requests or solicitations had been made, enraged her. Paris, she assured Selina, was no longer what it had been. Genius no more received due homage there, or else her enemies in England had concocted some scheme to frustrate her hopes of popularity in the French capital.

On the evening of the assembly at the English Embassy, Lady Caldersfoot commenced her *toilette* at least three hours before she could present herself there. Caps were tried on, turbans and *chapeaux*, in turn, replaced them; and at length her Ladyship decided, that as the present was to be her first appearance in public, she would, as a mark of appropriate distinction, wear the wreath of bays, commanded at Madame de Baréne, on the leaves of which, Selina was to sew the few loose brilliants her mistress possessed.

"How slow you are! will you never have done?" repeated the impatient lady, while her *femme de chambre* attached the diamonds

as rapidly as she could. A green velvet gown of obsolete fashion, and a scarlet India scarf embroidered in gold, with the wreath of bays, fastened behind by a bow of ribbon the colour of her scarf, and which fell down on her neck, as the fastening of the wreaths represented on the busts of Cæsar, completed the fantastic costume of Lady Caldersfoot. A quantity of rouge, put on the cheek-bones, as well as the rest of the cheeks, gave a peculiarly fierce look to her eyes, and her whole appearance was so *outré*, that Selina felt assured she would become an object of general observation at the embassy, for which she departed perfectly satisfied with her own appearance, and anticipating a triumphant *succès*.

When her Ladyship returned at a late hour, she was in high spirits.

"Never," exclaimed she "was there a more brilliant or successful *début* in the *beau monde*, than I have made this evening. No one else was looked at — no one else cared for except me; I was quite the attraction of the evening; and much of my brilliant reception was owing to two of the *attachés* at the embassy, who told every one who I was, not forgetting to explain that I am the first authoress in England. I must say those young men were justly proud of me, for they did nothing but present persons of distinction to me, and compliment me on my works. They even repeated passages out of my 'Delicate Delimma' and 'Elegant Errors.' I was really almost overpowered by their attention, and well-turned compliments. The Prince de Joinville was there, and was very civil to me. I overheard him tell a lady, that he should like of all things to have a likeness of me for the figure-head of his ship, — was not that flattering? It made the lady, and a very pretty person she is, so angry, that she affected to laugh in a scornful manner, but I knew it was her envy. Indeed, I must own that all the women seemed jealous of the sensation I excited, and the universal attention I received. Lady Granville, who is all amiability, was fearful I might be distressed by the sort of *furore* with which I was followed, and several times tried to check the *attachés* in their somewhat too marked attentions to me; but, dear, fine, young men, they were so enthusiastic in their admiration of their country-woman, and so anxious to make the French-

men partake it, that they could not be repressed. I told the Duke de Joinville, that although I had not yet had the honour of being presented at the Tuileries, I had the honour, and pleasure too, of seeing and speaking to the King. He looked surprised, asked where, and I told him. He quite enjoyed it. It is a great pleasure, and will, I am sure, be a great advantage to me to have made two such friends as the two *attachés*. They will, I foresee, spare me a good deal of expense in *annonces* — as the newspaper people here call advertisements — for they will tell every one of my celebrity. I remember perfectly having seen these two charming young men in society in London. They told me they were longing to have the honour of being presented to me then, but that they dared not request that favour, seeing me always surrounded by a crowd, offering homage to me, but that here, where my *renommée* had not yet become known, they ventured to enjoy my society before the Parisian world, as would be sure to be the case, engrossed me. They will, as they said, become my *proneurs*, and bring themselves into fashion by acting as my *aide-de-camps*."

Such was the state of excitement into which Lady Caldersfoot was thrown, that the doubts of her sanity, often before awakened in the mind of Selina, became renewed. Never previously could she have imagined that gratified vanity could have produced such an intoxication of the spirits as she now witnessed. It was evident to her, that the *attachés* at the embassy had been, what, in vulgar parlance, is called hoaxing Lady Caldersfoot, that the amiable Lady Granville had endeavoured to check their *mauvaises plaisanteries*, and that her vain and foolish mistress had furnished the subject of general hilarity to those to whom her mischievous and laughter-loving young countrymen had revealed her foibles, they exciting them into increased action by the gross flatteries they had addressed to her, without her suspecting for a moment that she was otherwise than an object of general attention and respect.

CHAPTER XLVII.

It had been agreed that the English Ambassadress was to pre-
ıt Lady Caldersfoot at the next reception at the Tuileries, which
as to take place in two days, and, previous to that event, her
xcellency wished to see that lady.

When she returned from the embassy, an expression of great
satisfaction was visible in her countenance. "I am quite an-
oyed, Selina," observed her Ladyship, "for the Ambassadress
s been giving me some advice about my dress, which, though I
n sure it was kindly meant, places me in a disagreeable dilemma.
I adopt it, the dress I have ready for the occasion cannot be
orn; and if I do not, it will appear as if I disregarded the opinion
the Ambassadress, to whom I wish to pay every mark of respect.
er Excellency told me that dress was a matter of grave import at
aris; that the peculiar taste of the individual was never consulted,
at that all ladies adopted the prevailing fashion, with a due re-
rence to the age of the wearers. For example, that women once
assed their early youth, never wore pale pink, in France, or
ven pale blue, that grave and sober colours were alone worn by
omen over thirty; and recommended me to pay attention to these
ints. Can anything be more absurd? If I did not know that
e Ambassadress is the most amiable person in the world, and
ite superior to entertaining any feelings of envy or jealousy, I
ould be disposed to think that this advice might be dictated by a
otive of preventing my making as distinguished an appearance as
I followed my own taste. I suppose the truth is, that, being
xtremely popular at Paris, her Ladyship is fearful of creating
ngry feelings in the breasts of the French ladies, by my eclipsing
em a Court, and so wishes to diminish the effect of my appear-
ce by suggesting my adoption of the general mode, which
nders all women alike, whereas my own taste in dress always
akes me appear *unique*, and at one glance points me out as a re-
arkable person. The young *attachés*, the other night, advised
e earnestly *not* to change my style of dress. They said it was
rfection; and men I have always considered better judges of

dress than women. At least, in men there can be but one motive for praising; *they* speak from the heart. I must, I fear, abandon my lovely court-dress, which produced such an effect at the last drawing-room of our Queen. Prince Albert appeared extremely struck with it. Pink and silver has always been considered peculiarly becoming to me. How vexatious not to be able to wear it here!"

A new court-dress had to be made; and Lady Caldersfoot, having adhered to the kind counsel of the English Ambassadress, made a much more respectable appearance than she had ever previously presented. Nevertheless the profuse use of *rouge*, and the juvenility of her *coiffure*, deteriorated considerably from the effect of the handsome court-dress, and brought a blush to the cheeks of the amiable lady who was to present her, and who, truly patriotic in her feelings, wished the English to appear to the best advantage at Court.

When dressed, and waiting for her carriage to proceed to the Tuileries, Lady Caldersfoot received a pile of French newspapers — more remarkable for their drollery and piquancy, than for the propriety or good taste of their contents.

"Open them, Selina. Make haste and glance over the columns. I am sure, by their being sent to me, that they must contain something that will give me pleasure, and exhilirate my spirits for my presentation at Court. I dare not open them myself, lest they might soil my dress."

The colour rose to the face of Selina as her eye glanced over the pages, and caught a tissue of the most poignant ridicule, and sarcastic comments levelled at her mistress, in consequence of the articles published by that lady in Galignani, and the French papers.

"Why don't you read the paper aloud?" demanded Lady Caldersfoot. "You know I am in momentary expectation of the carriage being announced."

"The article in this journal," said Selina, laying down the *Figaro*, "is not of a nature to give pleasure; it is extremely impertinent."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Lady Caldersfoot, looking very

angry; "my enemies, my enemies again at work! Look over the others; they cannot surely be *all* offensive."

Selina glanced over each of the papers, but, finding all of the same character, told her mistress that they were beneath her notice.

"Read me the least offensive, that I may judge whence it proceeds," said Lady Caldersfoot.

"If your Ladyship will excuse me, I shall feel obliged," replied Selina, really unwilling to inflict the pain she felt such attacks must give her foolish mistress.

"You will put me out of all patience," observed that lady, "read, and at once, as I have already twice told you."

Selina, pitying the mortification which the article she was so peremptorily commanded to read aloud, must give to one so vain, commenced perusing the following article, not daring to turn her eyes for a moment on Lady Caldersfoot: —

"*La bizarrerie des Anglais était, et sera toujours un sujet inépuisable de ridicule; mais il était réservé à une vieille folle qui se nomme Miladi Caldersfoot,* (eh quel nom!) d'y mettre le comble. Nos lecteurs ne croiront pas, probablement, qu'une personne qui a la vanité inouie de vouloir se faire passer pour une femme de lettres, ait l'effronterie d'écrire sur elle-même des éloges les plus dégoûtants qu'elle fait insérer dans nos journaux, et que nos rédacteurs par espièglerie ont imprimés sous forme d'annonces. Avec tout le désir de ne pas interrompre l'entente cordiale entres les individus deux nations, nous ne pouvons pas résister d'exposer la folie d'une 'précieuse ridicule,' encore plus absurde qu'aucune de celles dépeintes par Molière, et qui fait tort à son pays par son ignorance, et sa vanité extrême.*"

Selina read this insulting paragraph with as little emphasis as possible, wishing, as much as it was in her power, to diminish its force by a rapid perusal. The unfortunate person, however, to whom it was directed, felt every line, nay every word, as if a poniard had been forced into her breast, and writhed in agony under the infliction. No wounds inflicted on the body are so se-

* "*Caldersfoot veut dire en Anglais Colderfeet; c'est à dire pied plus froid.*"

verely felt as those given to the vanity, and as Lady Caldersfoot's was most excessive and vulnerable, her sufferings were intense.

"The wretches! the monsters! the cowards!" exclaimed the enraged authoress between every sentence. "Yes, I see *my* enemies have bribed those of my country to attack me in this dastardly manner. But England will take it up, I feel persuaded. The Ambassador here will demand satisfaction of the Prime Minister. It will, doubtless, be made a national question; for England never will suffer itself to be outraged in the person of one of its brightest literary ornaments. Alas! this is one of the penalties of Fame; and I could weep bitter tears, that I, the lover of peace, whose writings have ever tended to humanize, and soften national asperities, should be the innocent cause of a war, in which thousands may be slain. Would that I could cheat myself into the hope that such fearful results may not follow; for I look down from the lofty eminence where my genius has elevated me, with contemptuous pity on such infamous attacks; and, were my country not wounded through me, I should receive them as new proofs of my superiority. What real genius, of this, or any age, has escaped the shafts of envy? Voltaire himself, whose writings some of mine are thought to resemble, had his Freron; and Pope his Curl and Dennis. You see how cool, how unmoved I am. Look at me, that you may hereafter remember how true genius meets the envenomed darts that seek to wound it."

Selina, as commanded, raised her eyes to the face of Lady Caldersfoot, but instantly turned them away, so much was she shocked by the change in it. Not all the *rouge* of that lady could conceal the livid paleness that bespread her visage. Her eyes flashed with anger, and her thin lips trembled.

"Yes, I am unmoved," repeated she, though her unsteady voice told a different tale, "quite unmoved, nay, glad; for this vile attack will draw the attention and excite the sympathy of all Europe."

The carriage was now announced, and Lady Caldersfoot, although tremulous with emotion, did not forget to cast an anxious glance at the mirror before which she stopped, laid on some more *rouge*, and then descended to her carriage, affecting

a composure that she was far from feeling, and which did not deceive Selina as to the real state of her mind.

"Poor woman," thought she, "how does she by her vanity embitter a life, that, without pretensions which have not even the basis of ordinary talent or education to found them on, and which, consequently, expose her to ridicule, might pass tranquilly, if not happily. She is, naturally, neither ill-natured nor unkind; but having taken the absurd fancy of becoming an authoress, without any one of the requisites for such a profession, she becomes vexed and angry by anything that militates against her ambition, and is either in a state of excitement, produced by the flatteries of those who mock her, or almost maddened by the severity of the truths of those who search to correct her folly."

In due time Lady Caldersfoot returned from the Tuileries.

"I have had a most kind reception," said she to Selina. "The King and Queen were most gracious to me. Both, with the greatest condescension, asked me how long I had been at Paris; hoped I liked it, and that I intended to make some stay. I ought to mention, that the distinguished gentleman who put up the steps and closed the door of my carriage the other day, was *not* the King, and, I now believe, could be no other than the Prime Minister. He certainly must be the next in authority to his Majesty, for there was a lofty grandeur in his air and manner that could only belong to some very remarkable person. When I found the King so amiable and kind to me, I took the liberty of telling him that my stay in France must depend on a stop being put to the shameful attacks published against me in the French newspapers, and I named the *Figaro* and the other papers."

"I regret, my Lady," said his Majesty, "that anything could occur to occasion you pain; but let me advise you to treat such attacks as I do, — smile at them."

"I replied, that so I felt disposed to do; but that the dread I entertained of the insult to me being taken up as a national question by England, and leading to a war, alarmed me. His Majesty was, at that moment, seized by so violent a fit of coughing, that for some minutes he was obliged to keep his handkerchief to his face;

and, to prove to you what courtiers the French are, no sooner did he cough, than all the circle around him coughed too, and applied their handkerchiefs to their faces. But when his long fit of coughing had subsided, he kindly told me not to be alarmed, for that such was the perfect good understanding, the *entente cordiale*, as he said, between the two nations, that he hoped nothing would interrupt it; and then, I suppose, because his Majesty found that I might still further urge him, and that he felt he could not embroil himself with the press, he bowed, and moved on to speak to some one else in the circle. The Ambassadress appeared greatly embarrassed while I was speaking to the King. I conclude that she was afraid I might compromise the position of her husband, by declaring my intention of insisting on his interference. Indeed, her Excellency afterwards explained to me, that attacks in newspapers were, in France as in England, either left unnoticed, or the journalists were prosecuted for libels, and advised me particularly not to take any further step whatever in the affair."

"I trust your Ladyship will adopt such good advice," said Selina.

"I have not yet made up my mind. I am so perfectly mistress of repartee, and have such a facility of writing *piquant* and *tranchantes* things, that I should really like to answer those impertinent journalists, and prove to them that wit and raillery is not confined toFrance; and that if their country could boast a Madame de Sévigné, who excelled in the epistolary style, and a Madame Dacier, versed in erudition, England has women, at the head of whom I believe I may without vanity place myself, who need not yield the palm of excellence to France." Lady Caldersfoot drew herself up, and assumed an air of dignity. "I think," resumed she, "that it was rather strange that when the Ambassadress presented me, she never referred to my celebrity. I expected her Excellency would at least have said, 'I have the honour of presenting to his Majesty the King of the French, and to her Majesty the Queen, Lady Caldersfoot, the most celebrated of English authoresses.' But not a word of this was said, and I believe my position, as the head of English literature, would have not been known, had not the Prince de Joinville (oh! what a charming young man he is) whispered some-

thing in the ears of the King and Queen, which I feel confident produced that extreme kindness in their manner towards me; for which I must feel for ever grateful. I am sure they did not address the same flattering words to any one else at the reception. Yes, I never can forget both the King and Queen condescending to ask me how long I had been in France, how I liked it, and how long I intended to stay, and then the friendly smiles which accompanied these kind questions. Yes, I may indeed well be proud of such flattering and gratifying attention from such a quarter. However, although the Ambassadress did not refer to my celebrity, the two young *attachés* (and most amiable and gifted young men they are) made it generally known, and the consequence was, that all eyes were turned on me. I saw my two young compatriots telling all their acquaintances who I was, as I could easily judge by the persons spoken to turning their glances on me. The Prince de Joinville, too, took great notice of me, and was most gracious. *Son Altesse Royale* even condescended to express his regret that I had not adhered to my English costume for court, because as he was pleased to say he thought it so peculiarly elegant and becoming."

So ran on Lady Caldersfoot during the whole time that Selina was taking off her Court-dress, her eyes constantly fixed on the *Psyché* before which she stood, evidently perfectly pleased by her own appearance, and the effect she believed it had produced, and meditating future *succès* in the French capital, the recollection of the annoyance of the morning lost in the pleasure so lately received at the *Tuileries*.

"Well," thought Selina, "if vanity often furnishes sources of mortification acutely felt, it must be owned that the salve applied by its own credulity, soon heals the wound." And as she made this reflection, she felt her pity for her foolish mistress degenerate into a sentiment much more akin to contempt.

Lady Caldersfoot imagined that having been presented at court, and having appeared at a *soirée* at the English Embassy, she should find herself sought after by the most distinguished persons in the Parisian world of literature and fashion. But when, after a few days of hope deferred, and that her expectations were disappointed, her anger became aroused, and she vented her mor-

tification in bitter comments on the envy and jealousy of the Parisians, who could so neglect a woman whose presence in their capital conferred honour on them and it.

"Talk of *l'entente cordiale*," would she say to Selina "it 's all a pretence. If the French *really* wished to preserve it, would they have missed an opportunity of conciliating and marking their respect for England and the English, by showing every possible attention to *me?* My enemies have, I know, taken active steps to prevent my receiving the homage due to me here; nevertheless, they could not have so completely succeeded, had not the jealousy of the French aided their malice." A dinner given at the Tuileries to some distinguished individuals of the English aristocracy, and to which her Ladyship was not commanded, achieved her total discomfiture. That the King and Queen could after so flattering a reception, leave *her* out at a dinner given to some of her compatriots, was a slight not to be overlooked. There must be something more than met the eye in such a grave insult, and she deemed it a duty due to herself to ascertain the cause.

A long letter was forthwith written to the Ambassadress, requesting to be made acquainted with the motive for such an unprecedented instance of neglect, and offence, offered to a person whose celebrity *must* be so well-known, and who merited a very different treatment. The answer, although written with all the tact, good-breeding, and kindness which ever characterized the Ambassadress, and which rendered her Ladyship so beloved at Paris, failed to satisfy Lady Caldersfoot. That the invitations, or rather the commands to the Tuileries emanated entirely from the court, and could not be interfered in by ambassadors — Lady Caldersfoot found it difficult to believe; and that any remonstrance addressed to Royalty on such a subject (as her Ladyship threatened to write,) would be deemed most indecorous and improper, she could hardly be brought to admit. A disagreeable correspondence with the Ambassadress was the result, and Lady Caldersfoot determined on no longer prolonging her sojourn in a capital *where genius* and celebrity were so little appreciated.

The evening of the day on which this resolution was adopted, a command to a concert at the Tuileries considerably mollified

her Ladyship's anger; and although, when she returned from it, she told Selina that no less than three hundred persons had been present, she persisted in asserting, that to be invited to concerts at the palace, was a much greater distinction than to be engaged to dinner. His Majesty, too, had not only smiled very graciously to her, but had, quite in a confidential way, remarked on the heat of the room; and the Queen had in the most amiable manner inquired if she were fond of music? "I feel persuaded" added Lady Caldersfoot, "that their Majesties having been informed of my passion for music, (a pretension Selina had never previously heard her mistress advance,) they gave the concert in compliment to *me*," and this belief soothed her wounded vanity so much, that her temper recovered its tone, she spoke in terms of the highest eulogium of the Royal family, and wrote accounts to London for insertion in the papers, of the distinguished favour shown her at the Tuileries.

The change of air had so much benefitted the health of Selina, that she no longer desired to remain on the continent unless she could obtain a situation with a more rational, and less ridiculous mistress, than her present one. She shrank, in dismay, from the *exposés* to which Lady Caldersfoot was continually subjecting herself, and was tired, beyond endurance, by the daily, nay, hourly, self-laudations of her Ladyship, as well as by her absurd schemes for extending a celebrity that existed only in her own weak brain. To accompany her to the South of France and Italy, would be, Selina felt, to expose herself to a series of annoyances, which she had not courage to encounter; and yet, as with all her faults and follies, Lady Caldersfoot had always treated her with civility, she hesitated to leave her in a foreign land.

"I hope you employ the time not occupied in my personal service, in making notes that may be useful for my work," said her mistress. "Write down your reflections likewise; for, as Mirabeau turned the notes furnished by Dupont to account, I can convert yours into passages of such profound thought and brilliant diction, that you never could imagine that mere common-place remarks could have suggested them. Be assured, that genius is

the true Midas, whose touch turns all to gold, as I will prove to you if you write notes."

The proprietor of the hotel and his wife had, from the commencement of Lady Caldersfoot's *séjour* in their house, treated Selina with the utmost kindness and attention. They soon discovered her superiority to the subordinate place she filled, and as quickly observed the follies of her mistress, and pitied a well educated person, who was subjected to a daily endurance of them. Many comforts, for which no charge was made to Lady Caldersfoot, were provided for Selina; not the least of which was the loan of books, that agreeably filled up her solitary hours. Selina was one day descending the stairs to return some of the books lent to her, when the tones of a well-remembered voice struck on her ear. She paused, turned round to look on the speaker, and recognised the kind, the beautiful, Mrs. Fraser, and one of her sisters. Overjoyed, she approached them, and, no sooner had Mrs. Fraser caught a view of her face, than she ran and embraced her, exclaiming, "Dear, good, Selina! — how delighted I am to see you! Do come into my apartment;" and seizing the hand of Selina, she drew, rather than led her into one of the *salons* of a very handsome suite of rooms, where Mrs. Herbert and her other daughter were occupied writing at a table. Nothing could exceed the kindness of the reception she met with from that excellent woman and her unmarried daughters; while from Mrs. Fraser, a more affectionate one could not be given by a sister. They had arrived from the South of France only the previous evening, *en route* for England, where they were returning sooner then they had intended, owing to Miss Herbert's being on the eve of marriage with a young English nobleman, with whom they had become acquainted during their travels.

"All the work of this dear, dear creature," said Mrs. Herbert, imprinting a kiss on the brow of Mrs. Fraser, "who has bestowed a fortune on her sisters that renders them eligible matches for those whose parents might otherwise make objections that probably could not be got over."

"No, no, dear mother. Be assured Lord Gulstone would *have* gladly married dear Emma had she been portionless, and *his*

parents love him too well to have offered any obstacle to his wishes."

"Just like you, dearest, always trying to make light of the good you do," said the fond mother, her eyes beaming with tenderness.

"And who are you with here, my good Selina?" inquired Mrs. Fraser. "How glad I am that we are in the same house." When informed that Selina was living with Lady Caldersfoot, Mrs. Herbert shook her head: "Poor Lady Caldersfoot!" said she; "I knew her very well some years ago. I hope she is not still searching after celebrity and acquiring only notoriety. But I should have said poor *Selina*, instead of poor Lady Caldersfoot, for, unless her Ladyship is greatly changed indeed, Selina cannot have a comfortable place."

"Then she *must* come to me," interrupted Mrs. Fraser, taking Selina's hand. "You look pale and languid, my dear girl; indeed you do. Ah! I knew, when I saw the terrible event announced in the English papers, what you would feel, and often and often did I think of you, and wish to know where to write to you, to ask you to come to me. There, don't weep, dear Selina, for if you have lost one friend you have still an older, and a most attached one, hasn't she mother?"

"Yes, three friends," replied Mrs. Herbert, "for never can your sisters or I forget what a comfort she was to you and to me, when we required her kindness."

"But do, dear Selina, arrange to come to me, and return to England with us. I will transfer my present *Femme de Chambre* to Emma on her marriage, and you will always stay with me, won't you?"

Selina found it difficult to tear herself away from her kind friends, and before she left them was obliged to promise to let them see her as frequently as possible, and to make arrangements for leaving Lady Caldersfoot and returning with them to England. When she had reached the door Mrs. Fraser called her back, and said, "Oh! I forgot to ask you what was the good you derived from a certain Messrs. Scott and Murray, solicitors in Lincolns-Inn-Fields, who advertised, that if Miss Selina Stratford, lately

living with the deceased Duchess of Glenallen, would apply to them, or furnish her address, she would hear of something greatly to her advantage. My mother cut out the advertisement."

"Yes," observed Mrs. Herbert, "and here it is;" drawing it forth from her writing-desk. "I thought it just possible that you might not see it, so kept it to show you when we met."

"I never saw or heard of it," replied Selina. "Probably the advantage held out is the balance of salary due to me by my late beloved mistress, which I never thought of since the terrible catastrophe that deprived me of her;" and Selina's eyes filled with tears, as they always did whenever she reverted to the death of the Duchess.

"You should, however, write to the solicitors at once," said Mrs. Herbert, "and I will forward your letter with mine by this post."

In due time an answer was received from Messrs. Scott and Murray, stating that their late client, the Duchess of Glenallen, had, in consideration of Miss Stratford's faithful services to her, and to mark her regard, bequeathed her the sum of five thousand pounds, with a portrait of her Grace, a large collection of books, some trinkets, and the whole of her wardrobe. Although nearly overpowered by contending emotions at finding herself now blessed with a competency that would preclude her henceforth from servitude, this noble generosity of a mistress, whose loss she had never ceased to deplore, touched her feelings so deeply, that it was long ere she could think of aught but that beautiful and beneficent being, consigned to a premature grave.

Mrs. Fraser, and her mother and sisters, were overjoyed beyond measure at the good fortune of one whom they so highly valued. Not so was Lady Caldersfoot, who, when apprised of the fact, acknowledged that *she* had read the advertisement the day after Selina had entered her service, but that fearful of the possibility of losing so useful a companion for her travels, had concealed the circumstance from her *femme de chambre;* proving that self, and self alone, was ever thought of by her. She added, that this unexpected accession of fortune would be a very striking incident in a novel, and that she would certainly make use of it.

"You should rejoice that I kept the secret," continued her Ladyship, "since you may now boast of having approached my person in the most confidential manner; an honour which, from my great celebrity, will reflect much more distinction on you, than if you had served Royalty itself."

Selina returned to England with Mrs. Fraser; engaged a little cottage close to the beautiful Villa near Richmond, purchased by that lady; where, surrounded by the books so often perused aloud to her departed benefactress, and with her portrait placed in her little parlour, where it is never looked at without grateful emotion, she passes her life tranquilly; a day seldom goes by without Mrs. Fraser or her sister dropping in to cheer her solitude. It is said that the curate of a neighbouring parish, a young man highly esteemed, is soon to become the husband of Selina, who, we hope, will, as a happy wife, forget the trials to which she was exposed as a Governess and FEMME DE CHAMBRE.

THE END.

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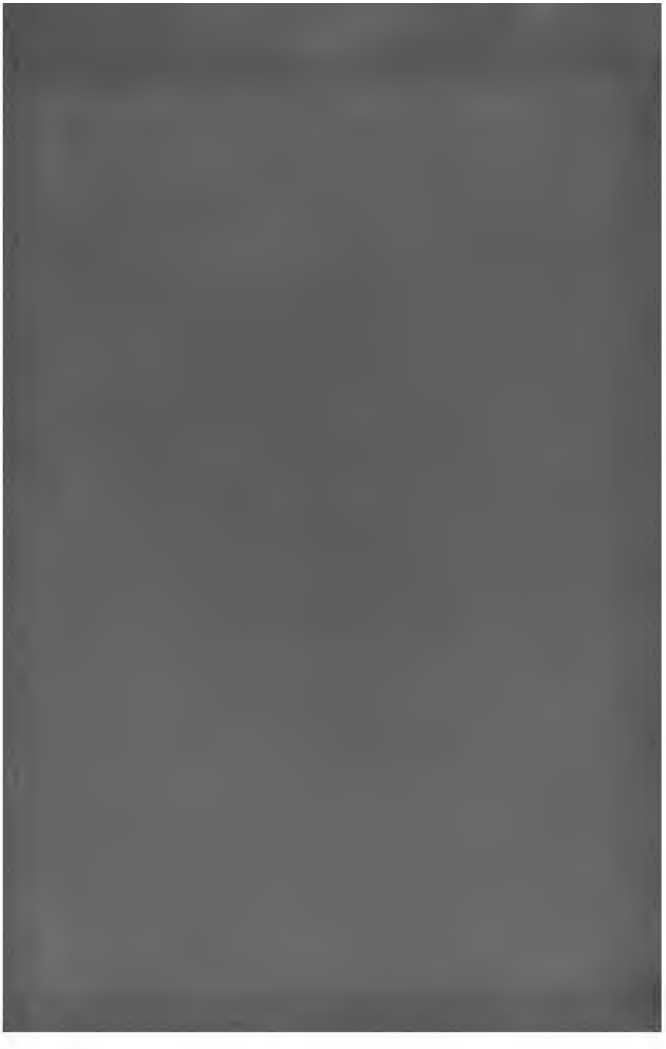

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